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FEBRUARY 5, 2007 WASHINGTON, D.C. ISSUE 4,803 VOLUME 236

COVER STORY

Jed Perl **21** **ART** | **Laissez-Faire Aesthetics** Auction prices are reaching nose-bleed heights. Art fairs are becoming the playgrounds of the super-rich. Museums and galleries are extolling whatever the market will bear. And, what's worse, the spirit of money is infecting the making of art itself. How did something so high fall so low? An analysis of the corruption.

POLITICS & THE WORLD

4 **CORRESPONDENCE** Defending Mandela, Iran's pragmatism, &c.

Peter Beinart **6** **TRB** | **Black Like Me** Why white people like Barack Obama.

The Editors **7** **Taps** How do you make Alberto Gonzales stop lying?

Michelle Cottle **8** **Barack Star**
Hillary Clinton prepared for everything—except this.

Bradford Plumer **9** **Hearing Aid** Who will protect companies from congressional investigations? The same people who helped get them in trouble in the first place.

Joshua Kurlantzick **11** **Hmong Friends** The warlord of St. Paul, Minnesota.

Yossi Klein Halevi and Michael B. Oren **15** **Contra Iran**
Why Israelis are afraid, very afraid.

Scott Thomas **34** **BAGHDAD DIARIST** | **War Bonds**

BOOKS & THE ARTS

Stanley Kauffmann **20** **FILMS** | **Selves Discovered** *The Italian* sets a Dickensian tale in Russia; *Notes on a Scandal* is supremely skilled.

Oren Harman **27** **Sermons in Stone** *The Seashell on the Mountaintop: A Story of Science, Sainthood, and the Humble Genius Who Discovered a New History of the Earth* by Alan Cutler; *The Man Who Found Time: James Hutton and the Discovery of the Earth's Antiquity* by Jack Repcheck

Judith Bishop **32** **POEM** | *Issuance*

RECREATION OF JOHN CURRIN'S "TWISTING GIRL," 1996, BY *David Brinley*; PICTURE FRAME BY *Getty Images*

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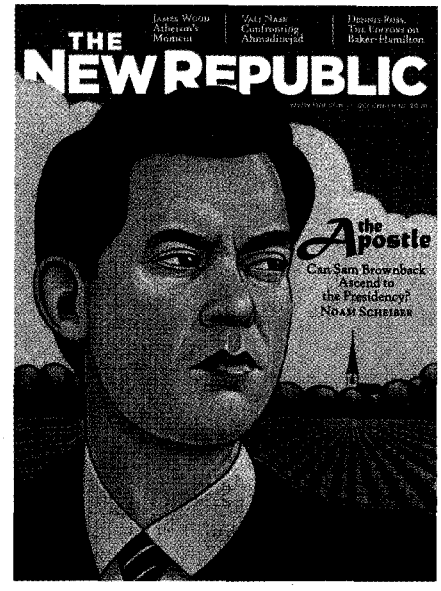
CORRESPONDENCE

SCANDELA

THE NEW REPUBLIC DID ITSELF NO favors publishing this snide and gratuitous attack on former South African President Nelson Mandela ("Half Nelson," December 18, 2006). The article quotes a letter from Mandela to *Blood Diamond* director Edward Zwick. Mandela hoped that, in telling the story of Sierra Leone's civil war and the role played by diamonds, the filmmaker would not send a message that people should stop buying diamonds mined in Africa. "None of this makes much sense," sneers Isaac Chotiner. Actually, it makes a lot of sense. These are the legitimate concerns of a deeply principled man—one who has devoted his life to the cause of a peaceful, prosperous, and justly governed Africa, from whose natural abundance all its people—not just a small elite—may finally benefit. If affluent consumers are persuaded to shun African diamonds because there have been instances—the exception, nowadays, not the rule—in which diamonds have been used to finance evil, Africa will find itself plundered of the very wealth it needs to put a permanent end to the misery depicted by Zwick. Not for the first time, the plunderers will be outsiders serving their own interests while claiming to advocate on Africa's behalf.

SIMON BARBER
U.S. Country Manager
International Marketing Council of South Africa
Washington, D.C.

ISAAC CHOTINER RESPONDS:
Simon Barber makes a false distinction identical to one voiced frequently by Mandela and the major diamond companies. There are very few people calling for a boycott of African diamonds (this was true even during the worst days of Sierra Leone's civil war). What many human rights activists, from the United States to Africa, were in fact advocating was a verifiable monitoring system that would prevent conflict diamonds from entering the world market and protect the legitimate diamond industry. Why this would have crippled Africa's economy, as Mandela and Barber would have us believe, is beyond my powers of comprehension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the Apostle
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NOAH SCHEIBER

(especially if we are to accept Mandela's claim that over 99 percent of purchased diamonds are conflict-free). Unfortunately, as it currently stands, such a policy is not in place, and there is no way to independently verify whether diamonds from a variety of African countries are clean. As for Barber's final comment, I'm sure the good and dedicated people at organizations like Amnesty International and Global Witness can respond to the statement that they are "plunderers ... serving their own interests." Their work deserves attention and praise, not cheap shots from the likes of Barber.

PERSIAN GULF

I READ WITH INTEREST THE REVIEW of my book, *Confronting Iran*, by Professor Vali Nasr ("The New Hegemon," December 18, 2006). While generous in parts, I was struck by the main thrust of Nasr's comments, which, to my mind, indicated either a misreading or miscomprehension of my analysis. Nasr, for example, repeatedly makes the point that I portray the Iranian leadership as "pragmatic," even more "pragmatic than they themselves claim to be." Since this book is fundamentally about the ideologies and myths of confrontation (as outlined in the introduction), I fail to see how he can come to this conclusion. Furthermore, as I note in my own conclusion: "All the criticisms that have been applied to the West can be applied equally to Iran, whose capacity for mythic construction and consumption traditionally outstrips anything the West can offer." Professor Nasr is welcome to disagree with my view that all parties have been guilty of perceiving the other through a compounded ideological prism, but I do not think the text supports his assertion that I view Iran as a "pragmatic" power. The book lists multiple examples of ideologically driven activities that have harmed Iran's strategic interests—including, I should add, the hostage crisis. I am perplexed that he should suggest I have argued that the United States bears the brunt of the blame for the hostage crisis. This is a very strange understanding of the text, which states categorically (in a paraphrasing of Talleyrand) that the seizure of the embassy was worse than a crime—it was a mistake. To suggest that I have argued otherwise, as Nasr appears to, indicates a very quixotic reading of the text.

ALI M. ANSARI
Professor of History
University of St Andrews
St Andrews, Scotland

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

In "Passions and a Man" (January 15), Emily Wilson incorrectly states that Mantua is near Naples. We regret the error.

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St. Augustine warned that it is dangerous for religious people to ignore science: "Many non-Christians are well versed in natural knowledge, so they can detect vast ignorance in such a Christian and laugh it to scorn."

On the other hand, Sir Isaac Newton freely discusses the attributes and activities of God in *Principia Mathematica,* which sets forth his theory of gravity and laws of motion.

These examples represent the traditional relationship of science and religion that is too often obscured by the divisive, hot-headed rhetoric and the gross oversimplifications we often see in today's headlines. Long before the shouting and the sloganeering, scientists and theologians have pursued a unity of truth, and most theologians have agreed with the advice of Galileo's colleague, Cardinal Baronio, that the Bible "tells us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go."

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Dr. Lawrence M. Principe is Professor of the History of Science and Technology, and Professor of Chemistry at Johns Hopkins University. He received a Ph.D. in Organic Chemistry from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in the History of Science from Johns Hopkins University. He has won several Johns Hopkins teaching awards and the 2004 Francis Bacon Prize from the California Institute of Technology.

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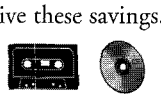

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Black Like Me

TRB FROM WASHINGTON

In 1994, two sociologists went to Red Hook, Brooklyn, to solve a mystery. Red Hook abutted the East River, and along the waterfront sat shipping companies and warehouses—all in need of low-skilled labor. Next door sat a housing project teeming with exactly that. But the locals—primarily African Americans—didn't get hired. Instead, the jobs went to workers from outside the neighborhood, often Caribbean immigrants. Employers, wrote *The New Yorker*'s Malcolm Gladwell in summarizing the sociologists' findings, "had developed an elaborate mechanism for distinguishing between those who they felt were 'good' blacks and those they felt were 'bad' blacks." Were the employers racist? Yes and no. They clearly held anti-black stereotypes. And they discriminated against those who conformed to them, even by association. But they discriminated *in favor* of blacks who defied those stereotypes. A man named Bruce Llewellyn described the phenomenon this way: "White people love to believe they're fair."

As it happens, Llewellyn wasn't talking about Red Hook. He was talking about his cousin, Colin Powell—whose prospective presidential bid enjoyed mass white support roughly a decade ago. Like the employers in Red Hook, whites discriminated in Powell's favor because he challenged their negative stereotypes of blacks. First, he had succeeded in a respected white institution: the military. Second, he was the child of immigrants, a man whose family history highlighted America's opportunities, not its racism. Third, he wasn't ideologically radical. And, fourth, he didn't look or sound stereotypically black. No one was blunter about this than Powell himself. Asked in 1995 to explain his appeal to whites, he volunteered that "I speak reasonably well, like a white person," and, visually, "I ain't that black."

Barack Obama would never put it that way. But he surely understands the uncomfortable subtext behind the adoration being showered upon him by white America. Obama, too, succeeded at a prestigious white institution: Harvard Law School. He, too, is a child of immigration, able to declare in his 2004 Democratic convention speech—in words that could have come from Michael Dukakis or Joe Lieberman (but not from a descendant of slaves, without heavy irony)—that "in no other country on Earth is my story even possible." And he, too, doesn't sound or look too black. Fifteen years ago, a State University of New York political scientist named Nayda Terkildsen doctored photos of a fictitious gubernatorial candidate to make him lighter- or darker-skinned and then showed them to Kentucky focus groups. "The dark-skinned black candidate," she noted, "was evaluated much more harshly than his lighter skinned peer." Powell knew what he was talking about.

In U.S. politics, as in Red Hook, there are no "good" blacks without "bad" blacks. In the mid-'90s, reporters frequently compared Powell with Jesse Jackson: a man who fit all the stereotypes he defied. Today, it probably helps Obama that Al Sharpton, with his 2004 presidential run, became the "president of black America." For many white Americans, it's a twofer. Elect Obama, and you not only dethrone George W. Bush, you dethrone Sharpton, too.

But being the "good" black is tricky. The more whites love you, the more you must reassure your own community that you are still one of them. And the more you do that, the more you jeopardize your white support. In 2002, when the highly articulate, light-skinned, Yale-educated Cory Booker ran for mayor of Newark, New Jersey—becoming a darling of the white press—incumbent Sharpe James used that support against him, tarring him as inauthentically black. Last fall, when the well-spoken, light-skinned, St. Albans–educated Harold Ford Jr. ran for Senate in Tennessee, his family's political prominence in the Memphis black community made such accusations impossible. But it was those very connections—to a family viewed negatively by many whites—that may have cost him the race.

For Obama, walking the tightrope is a little easier. Unlike Booker, Obama's African American wife, his connection to the black church, and his work as a community organizer give him racial credibility. But, unlike Ford, he has no obvious ties to Jackson/Sharpton style "bad" blacks. And, compared with Powell, he benefits enormously from changes in the political climate. The first big change is the collapse of crime as a political issue. In the 1980s and early '90s, Democrats had to adopt ultra–hard line stances on crime to reassure anxious white voters. And blacks had to go even further. Had Obama run for president in 1992, he would have had do to something akin to Bill Clinton's infamous execution of mentally retarded murderer Ricky Ray Rector—which would have hurt him with blacks. Today, by contrast, he can largely oppose the death penalty with hardly anyone seeming to mind.

The second big change is welfare reform, which has significantly de-racialized the debate over taxing and spending. Because of welfare reform, the percentage of whites saying "poor people have become too dependent on government assistance" has dropped markedly. That's good news for all Democrats, but especially for Obama, who would be particularly vulnerable to suspicions that he was trying to redistribute money from whites to blacks.

But Obama doesn't merely benefit from the decline of racially saturated issues like welfare and crime. He also benefits from the fact that, as racial polarization has declined, religious polarization has increased. When the culture war was primarily about race, black candidates were inherently divisive (and when they tried to reach out, they risked seeming insufficiently black). Today, however, it is white liberals who seem divisive, because they are perceived as secular. Black liberals, by contrast, are considered authentically devout, and, thus, bridge-builders. In the '80s, it would have been virtually impossible for a black candidate with substantial black support to credibly promise to span America's cultural divide. Today, it is at the heart of Obama's appeal.

Does this mean that U.S. politics have transcended race? Not at all. In a presidential campaign, as in Red Hook, blacks must still defy white stereotypes to succeed. What has changed is that defying those stereotypes doesn't require moving as far to the right. That's hardly utopia, but it's progress. And, for Obama in 2008, it may be enough. **PETER BEINART**

Peter Beinart is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

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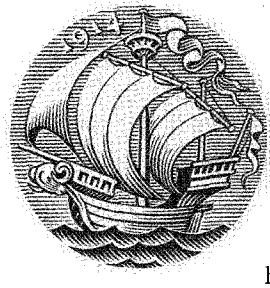
Taps

EVER SINCE HE became attorney general, Alberto Gonzales's appearances before the Senate Judiciary Committee have followed a grimly familiar script: Gonzales blandly announces that the president can do whatever he likes in the war on terrorism. Republicans fulsomely praise him for defending the homeland. Democrats sputter that he is asserting the right to break the law and ask whether he will acknowledge any limits on executive power. Gonzales promises to get back to them after talking to his "principal"—that is, Bush. And he concedes nothing.

Last week, all that seemed to change. First, the administration appeared to reverse itself dramatically on its warrantless wiretap program, announcing that it would now submit to judicial review by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance (FISA) court. A day later, when Gonzales made an appearance before the Senate—his first since the Democrats took control—he found himself assailed by members of both parties. Republican Senator Arlen Specter suggested that the "heavy criticism" the administration had invited by refusing to subject its terrorist surveillance program to judicial review may have contributed to the Republicans' loss of a "close election" and harmed the nation's reputation. Democrats showed a newfound aggression in refusing to accept Gonzales's obfuscations and promising to follow up with congressional investigations.

But actual circumstances might not have changed very much. First, the administration's wiretap reversal may be less than meets the eye. Senators from both parties expressed relief that the administration had finally abandoned its unsupervised surveillance program and agreed to apply for warrants from the secret FISA court. But few were satisfied with Gonzales's refusal to provide basic details about the new program, such as whether the government would be required to seek warrants for specific cases or could be broadly warranted to wiretap large categories of individuals. (President Bush himself suggested the latter in an interview, claiming that "nothing has changed in the program, except the court has said we've analyzed it [and] it is a legitimate way to protect the country.") When pressed on this point, Gonzales again resorted to stonewalling. Though Judiciary Chairman Patrick Leahy noted that the head of the secret surveillance court had agreed to release the decision endorsing the new program as long as the administration agreed, Gonzales said he would need to consult his "principal" before responding.



But Gonzales did not merely refuse to give an inch about the revisions to the surveillance program. He also refused to say whether the administration had the authority to open the mail of American citizens without a warrant—a clearly illegal act. And he refused to explain a recent speech at the American Enterprise Institute, in which he declared that "a judge will never be in the best position to know what's in the national security interest of the country"—an assertion of unilateral prerogative that almost dares judges to review cases arising from the war on terrorism.

The time for congressional patience with Gonzales's evasions has long past. The highest priority for the new congressional oversight that we can expect from Democrats should be to hold the Bush administration accountable for its lawless claims of executive unilateralism. This means, as Leahy recognized, that the Democrats should hold hearings on whether the Bush administration broke the law in the past.

But investigations into past abuses are not enough. The new Democratic Congress will also have to pass laws that restrict the executive branch's unilateralism in the future. To begin with, it should pass regulations making clear that the FISA court can only issue warrants for surveillance when an individual (or an identified group of individuals) is suspected of being a foreign spy or a terrorist, as the law requires, rather than authorizing the surveillance of broad categories of unidentified individuals. The Democrats will also have to pass new laws regarding military trials of detainees at Guantánamo, since those adopted by the administration last week are painfully inadequate. The administration and its allies will, no doubt, argue publicly that such laws will tie its hands in the war on terrorism and imply that anyone voting for them is abetting America's enemies. But holding the unilateralists in the administration accountable will require commitment and a willingness to defy the polls.

It's all very well that Democrats and Republicans have lost patience with Gonzales's sorry evasions. But now it's time for them to do more. ■

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Your move, Hillary.
Barack Star

BY MICHELLE COTTLE

This is going to be So Much Fun.

Say what you will about the downsides of a Hillary Clinton v. Barack Obama smack-down; it has already delivered a shot of adrenaline to the oh-so-jaded journalists who cover—and shape—the presidential election season.

Case in point: Last Wednesday, almost by accident, I found myself with a front-row seat for Hillary's press conference about her recent jaunt to Iraq/Afghanistan/Pakistan with Indiana Senator Evan Bayh and New York Representative John McHugh. The Senate TV studio was a zoo. In drooling anticipation of the senator's arrival, a couple hundred reporters crammed together tighter than a can full of Pringles, with many more hovering just beyond the door, prompting multiple Hill veterans to marvel at how they had never, ever seen the place so crazy—not even during impeachment. Just think about that for a moment: Even before announcing her presidential plans, Hillary was already drawing bigger crowds than Bill did *after* getting busted playing hide-the-cigar with Monica. Now *that* is star power.

As the mob continued to swell, the head of the gallery began freaking out and demanding order—threatening not to allow *any* senators into the room until the assembled group could behave itself. Cameramen, sweating profusely, crawled over one another in search of a clear shot. Outlying journalists began elbowing their way in. Someone cracked a joke about the fire marshal, and, for a few uneasy moments, my mind strayed to the annual news reports of Muslim pilgrims being trampled to death during the hajj.

Then, suddenly, there she was, resplendent in a long, red jacket, black slacks, and sensible pumps. The whir of 10,000 camera shutters clicking simultaneously could be heard all the way down Pennsylvania Avenue in the Oval Office (metaphorically, if not literally). With the formal, almost regal bearing that I suspect she'll need to play down on the campaign trail, Hillary crossed the dais first, stepping past the podium to allow Bayh to handle all the how-do-you-dos and here's-what-we'll-be-talking-abouts. With his eternally polite, scrupulously attentive manner, Bayh couldn't help but look a bit like Hillary's courtier. Which started me wondering if Bayh's recent, unexpected announcement that he would not be running for president himself (less than two weeks after forming an exploratory committee, mind you) had anything to do with hints from Team Hillary regarding her future plans for a running mate. (Though never a top-tier POTUS contender, Bayh has long been regarded as an ideal number two.) To avoid starting any rumors, let me stress that I've heard no such rumblings. Still, the two Senate centrists do make a lovely political couple.

During her portion of the presentation, Hillary introduced her contribution to the flood of congressional resolutions being floated in opposition to Bush's absurd "surge" plan for Iraq. Hers is a relatively ambitious proposal, which includes capping troop levels, tying funding for Iraqi security forces to certain benchmarks, and placing a raft of other benchmarks on both the Iraqi government *and* the Bush administration. Nobody's fool, she acknowledged that her proposal has about as much chance of passage as a pro–gay marriage bill in Dixie and that it is largely, as ABC's Jake Tapper put it to her, "a threat." Nonetheless, she feels that the proposal provides an opportunity to send a strong message to the White House that it had better get its act together. Fast.

The event, meanwhile, provided the political media a perfect opportunity to dissect precisely how Hillary is holding up in these early days of Obamania. (When her presser was postponed for a day, the move was immediately spun by the media as an attempt to avoid sharing the spotlight with her Senate colleague, who launched his exploratory committee Tuesday morning.) Did she seem surly? Tense? Spoiling for a fight? Not especially. Hillary has one of those faces that, at rest, often seems cloudy and formidable. It may have something to do with the heavy-lidded eyes, which can give her a bit of a lizard look. But, when the senator gets going on a topic, she visibly warms up. (On the trail, aides would do well to figure out a way for her to look

DAVID COWLES

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pleasantly engaged during those countless hours in which she'll be standing around listening to introductory speakers sing her praises.) In this case, she even managed a wry quip or two about the unlikelihood of her measure going anywhere anytime soon.

Even so, it was hard to tell if the glint in Hillary's pale eyes was one of satisfaction or irritation as she surveyed a journalistic mob that has, of late, been according Obama the same rock star treatment it grants her. As Democratic media consultant Anita Dunn notes, "Of all the challenges she has anticipated and prepared for, there was no way to anticipate or prepare for this one: the candidate whose celebrity value now matches her own, whose book sales match her own, and whose ability to command media attention nearly at will arguably matches her own." Plus, he looks way hotter in a swimsuit. With Senator Sexy in the mix, Clinton suddenly goes from being the iconic figure in the race to looking like "a much more conventional pick," observes a veteran of Bill Clinton's campaign team. "The central irony of her predicament is that we are on the cusp of potentially electing the first woman president of the United States—and she is *not* the candidate historically breaking the glass ceiling or the candidate with all the excitement and energy." On a more strategic level, Obama has certain obvious assets that could eat away not only at Hillary's share of women voters (That voice! That charm! Those chats with Oprah!) but also at her share of black voters, who have proved so vital to her family's political fortunes. "Hillary Clinton's secret weapon all along was that her husband was adored by the African American community," notes the Clinton campaign veteran. "It was my sense that this was the ace up their sleeve." But, now, Obama all but guarantees that the black vote will be "less monolithic."

So what's an ambitious, hard-charging girl to do? For starters, play the experience card. Thus far, the biggest question mark about Obama is whether he's too green to sit in the big chair. If you're part of Team Hillary, Democratic strategist Kenneth Baer says, the question you want voters asking of Obama is, "Where's the beef?" At the same time, Clinton's people must face head-on their own candidate's negatives—such as all those pesky "electability" questions about her tough, polarizing persona—and find a way to spin them as positives. In a recent "Campaign Memo" posted on the exploratory committee's website, Hillary strategist Mark Penn went on at length about how the senator is leading in the early polls despite enduring years of ugly, partisan attacks. In other words: What could the opposition possibly throw at us that we haven't already dealt with? Obama, by comparison, falls squarely into the category of those Penn derided for never having been "in the crossfire." Hillary is "doing what she needs to do," says Dunn. "Defining the race on her terms: 'in to win.' And she's never backed down, and she's the only one who knows how to beat them."

Now, my assumption going into this Hillary-Obama madness was that the two principals would be awash in media coverage while the rest of their colleagues wallowed in obscurity. But so immense is the celebrity radiated by these two that some of their colleagues may also, on occasion, accidentally benefit from its reflected glory. Take Senator Joe Biden, for instance, who, despite having announced his presidential candidacy close to three dozen times, has been hard-pressed to get reporters to care—much less to stalk him for surfside beefcake pics. But at the Hillary presser, Biden, along with colleagues Carl Levin and Chuck Hagel, found themselves in the happy position of having booked the Senate TV studio for the half-hour block immediately preceding her event in order to announce their own anti-Bush-plan Iraq resolution. This meant that reporters looking to secure a good seat for the main act came early for the Biden/Levin/Hagel opener. Even if Biden only got a handful of extra stories out of the coincidence, he clearly enjoyed all the extra attention.

And talk about a lawmaker who hit the jackpot. Hillary traveling buddy McHugh must have thought he had died and gone to heaven. An utterly unknown legislator who, earlier in the week, appropriately had been dubbed "Congressman McWHO?" by *The Washington Post*'s Dana Milbank, the New York rep looked ready to expire from happiness as he shared his thoughts and feelings with the assembled throng. It is a safe bet that, barring McHugh someday getting caught having sex in the House cloakroom with an underage page, never again will he have the attention of so many members of the Fourth Estate.

Of course, not everyone will wind up a winner. Even as journalists were assembling for Biden's pre-Hillary event, John Kerry was down on the floor of the Senate, holding forth on some random subject. Alone. With little more than the Senate recorder to keep him company.

As I said, this is going to be fun. ■

The oversight industry.
Hearing Aid

BY BRADFORD PLUMER

CORPORATIONS BEWARE! Henry Waxman is coming for you, subpoenas in hand. Now's the time to start panicking—or, at the very least, to ring up one of several Washington, D.C., law firms that specialize in helping clients under congressional investigation. "A simple phone call from a junior staffer on the Hill can snowball into a criminal prosecution. ... Being cautious at a time like this could save you, your business, and your reputation," warns the website of Bingham McCutchen, sounding not unlike a late-night Johnnie Cochran ad. (One pictures a drowsy, channel-surfing CEO suddenly perking up on the couch.) Another firm,

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Holland & Knight, has been flaunting its newly assembled "Congressional Investigations Response Team," with an all-star cast of former House and Senate staffers.

Now that Democrats have retaken Congress, the Era of Investigations is upon us, and all around town, nervous corporations are gulping hard over the carnage to come. Who can blame them for feeling uneasy? For over a decade, GOP oversight committees treated businesses with the lightest of touches—indeed, Republicans have been declining to investigate bloated Halliburton contracts ever since Dick Cheney was still CEO. As a result, says James Hamilton, a partner at Bingham who specializes in defending clients under scrutiny from Congress, "Many companies are not at all knowledgeable about how to handle serious investigations." But not to fear—a large poster hanging in Bingham's lobby offers hope: GREAT LAWYERS WILL FIND A WAY TO TURN THE TABLES IN YOUR FAVOR. The picture below it? A zebra lumbering after a retreating cheetah.

Washington being Washington, there's an ironic undercurrent to all this activity. Many of the law firms now offering protection from congressional investigations are the same ones that, through their lobbying operations, helped facilitate the envelope-pushing behavior that got these corporations in trouble in the first place. It's all part of the natural cycle of the Washington economy: When the GOP is in power, you make money by helping companies rig the rules; when Dems take the reins (in part because voters can only take so much rule-rigging), you make money by helping companies get back off the hook. No wonder they say Washington is recession-proof.

DEMOCRATS HAVE ONLY hinted at what investigations they'll conduct over the next two years. But every lawyer has his or her own list of businesses that should start sweating: oil and drug companies that profited from Bush-era policies; corporations that snagged no-bid contracts in Iraq; hedge funds. Some onlookers think that Congress will likely go hard after private companies, rather than directly confront a White House that's expected to be less than cooperative. "Say Congress wants to examine the oil-drilling leases handed out by the Interior Department," says Charles Tiefer, a veteran of countless Democratic House inquiries and now a law professor at the University of Baltimore. "The administration may not want to cooperate. But, if you can get records from oil companies and make them public, *then* it becomes much harder for them to resist and withhold information."

What makes the prospect of such investigations so nerve-racking is that companies can't just win a verdict and move on. "Working on an investigation is very different from working in a courtroom," says Eleanor J. Hill, a partner at King & Spalding and a former staff director of the joint congressional inquiry into September 11. "Congress has broader leeway on the type of questions they can ask, a lot of evidentiary rules don't apply, lawyers can't stand up and object every five minutes, there's no umpire to appeal to if they're being treated unfairly." The p.r. aspect also matters a great deal—businesses have to worry about their public image and reputation if they're being raked over the coals by a member of Congress. One lawyer sounded an almost fatalistic note about the process: "A company facing congressional hearings often just has to take its lumps and move on—the object is often simply to limit the damage, and a lot of damage you can't avoid."

So what *can* you do? How does the poor little zebra turn the tables on the cheetah? There's the diplomatic approach, for one, explains Jim Turner, a former Democratic representative from Texas who now works at Arnold & Porter, one of the top law firms dealing with investigations. "It really helps to know the people on the committee," he says. "You can find out the nature of the inquiry, you can tell them your side of the story and, sometimes, try to see if there's a way to head off the need for hearings in the first place." Then again, Arnold & Porter ranks as one of the top law firms in the country, housed in a massive building downtown with vast resources at its disposal. One gets the sense that, faced with such an adversary, even Waxman might be amenable to a friendly chat.

Not everyone plays so nice, of course. "When I think about the oil and pharmaceutical industries," says Tiefer, "I think about their ability to respond to any request for documents with millions of records to bury the inquirers and make it impossible to find the needles in the haystack. The [committee] staff with relevant expertise can often be counted on one hand and are no match for—literally—truckloads of documents." Most defense lawyers I spoke to, however, were more demure about their ability to overwhelm Congress. "Hypothetically, I can have more lawyers, but they have all the power to make demands, sway public opinion, hold hearings, issue subpoenas," says Lanny A. Breuer, a partner with Covington & Burling. "I'd like to think we're pretty good lawyers, but I don't have that power."

More frequently, a company has to fight its battles in the realm of public opinion. "If you're being treated unfairly, a lot of times the best and only recourse is to hit back in the area where Congress is hoping to have an impact—namely, through the press," says Bradford A. Berenson, a partner at Sidley Austin and former counsel for the Bush administration. "Committee chairs don't want to come across as unfair. If a company is unable to work out its differences, sometimes the only thing to do is complain publicly and openly."

OF COURSE, MANY of the law firms now offering to pull their corporate clients *out* of political hot water were, not so long ago, helping them get into it. Take Dickstein Shapiro. Over the years, the firm has helped tobacco companies lobby to rewrite tobacco regulations, energy companies to restructure the electric utility industry, and makers of bioterrorism prevention devices to influence homeland security legislation. Now that control of Congress has flipped, some of those industries could well come under investigation—and may turn to Dickstein

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Shapiro for help. Little wonder, then, that, right after the midterms, the firm lured away two top oversight lawyers from the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which will likely put a number of companies under its thumbscrews.

And it's not only white-shoe law firms that are rushing to grab a piece of the congressional-investigation pie. Smaller "crisis management" firms have been cropping up as well, offering to step in, guns blazing, when things get ugly. One such firm was recently formed by Mark Corallo and Barbara Comstock, previously Justice Department spokespersons for the Bush administration. Neither is a stranger to high-stakes political brawls: Comstock, a longtime GOP operative, worked as chief investigator for Representative Dan Burton when his Committee on Government Reform and Oversight was rummaging through Bill Clinton's personal life in the 1990s and now manages Scooter Libby's defense fund. Corallo, meanwhile, served as Karl Rove's spokesman during the Valerie Plame investigation.

Given this experience, the newly launched firm will be well-equipped to frame Democratic investigations as partisan witch hunts, should the need arise. "You have to be subtle," says Corallo. "You can't just say, 'Mr. Chairman, this is all politics.' But you *can* enlist outside help—surrogates, people who can quickly come to your defense in the media by writing op-eds or going on television." Not that Corallo is shy about entering the fray himself: When *Truthout*, a liberal Web publication, first reported—falsely, it turned out—that Rove had been indicted during the Plame affair, Corallo declared the reporters in question "bald-faced liars or completely delusional or both." Sometimes, Corallo suggests, you need to have a pugilist on your side, someone who understands how to work the press. "Many law firms just don't understand this. I'm constantly surprised at how naïve people can be, even people who have been in this town for 20 years." They'll have to learn quick. ■

The St. Paul warlord.

Hmong Friends

BY JOSHUA KURLANTZICK

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

MOST NIGHTS, THE streets of Maplewood, a Twin Cities suburb, resemble a tableau from "A Prairie Home Companion." Kids toss footballs in front of red and white ranch-style houses on quiet streets lined with evergreens and tiny flower gardens full of orange blossoms. Policemen in thick parkas roll down their car windows to chat with people power-walking in the Minnesota cold.

But, on April 20, 2004, Maplewood was more *Platoon* than "Prairie Home." That night, Hmong-American businessman Xang Vang was caring for his elderly mother at home when a hail of large-caliber bullets, shot from a car outside, blasted through his windows. The bullets slammed into the walls of his bedroom, pocking them with gaping holes. Xang Vang dove to the floor as his mom screamed. Frightened neighbors streamed into the street, searching for the shooters, but not in time to catch the gunman. "It was a miracle no one was hurt," Xang Vang said.

The attack resembled a professional hit, but Xang Vang seemed an unlikely target. In the 1970s, Xang Vang had immigrated to the United States from the mountains of northern Laos, where the Hmong had lived a tribal, almost Stone Age existence, without large towns or a written language. In St. Paul, Xang Vang, whose smooth skin and black hair worn in a slicked-back helmet conceal his late middle age, had made himself into a successful developer. From a small office near the Minnesota State Capitol, whose walls Xang Vang had plastered with photos of himself with Senator Norm Coleman and other local politicians, Xang Vang sold other Hmong their first houses. At night, he returned home to preside over an extended family that included his children and grandchildren.

Police rushed to Xang Vang's house but found no immediate suspects. Xang Vang had no criminal record or obvious enemies. Yet, one day later, the police received a call to another normally quiet Hmong neighborhood nearby. They arrived at a prominent Hmong and Lao social service organization called Lao Family Community to find it in flames. Someone had tossed a brick through the window and then set one of the organization's offices on fire.

Just four days after that, around 1:30 a.m. on April 25, someone tossed a suspicious object—a firebomb, said some locals—through the window of a split-level home owned by a friend of Xang Vang named Cha Vang. (Vang is a common Hmong surname.) As Cha Vang's three daughters, ages twelve, ten, and three, slept upstairs, the house began to burn. Cha Vang and his wife grabbed the kids and charged out of the inferno. By the time firefighters arrived and controlled the intense blaze, it had destroyed Cha Vang's $400,000 home and nearly everything his family owned.

Now the St. Paul police sensed a pattern. Just a day after the suspected arson at Cha Vang's home, someone found an unexploded Molotov cocktail outside a nearby Hmong-owned office, while neighborhood residents started receiving threatening phone calls promising far worse. Another apparent arson torched the home of a Hmong policeman.

Yet few St. Paul police officers could understand why guerrilla warfare seemed to have erupted in suburbia. Cops became so jittery they started invading Hmong neighborhoods at the first sign of suspicious activity. When a fire broke out in another Hmong home shortly after the Cha Vang incident, police rushed to the scene, only to find it had been a minor, accidental blaze. "We had no idea what was happening, where this was coming from," says Rich

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Straka, a police officer who investigated the string of incidents. "It was a total puzzle." Though no one had been killed in the attacks, Straka and his team feared that it was just a matter of time before someone was. They quickly set out to find the culprit.

LAST NOVEMBER, ON an unusually warm day, I visited the main auditorium of RiverCentre, the local arena in St. Paul. Billboards advertise an upcoming concert by Bob Seger, but, on this particular day, thousands of Hmong have gathered for a more unique event—the Hmong New Year festival. After migrating in large numbers to the United States in the '70s and early '80s, the Hmong settled primarily in the Twin Cities, as well as in Wisconsin and around Fresno, California. Today, some 24,000 Hmong live in St. Paul, which has a population of only 287,000.

The New Year festival mixes traditional Hmong rituals with modern U.S. pop culture. In the arena's basement, Hmong lay out blankets to create a traditional "open-air" market, with vendors selling intricately woven batik sarongs, medicines made from ground animal parts—and CDs of Hmong gangsta rappers. Upstairs, on the main auditorium stage, contestants for Miss Hmong America, dressed in gowns draped with silver coins (a Hmong tradition), dance to Hmong ballads that tell stories of love lost in the jungles of Laos. But the tales are crooned by a pop star who resembles a Hmong Elvis: a compact older man wearing a jumpsuit glittering with jewels and an enormous gold belt buckle.

By the early afternoon, Hmong of all ages fill nearly every seat in the auditorium. Older women pick through plates of spicy papaya salad and handfuls of glutinous sticky rice. Next to them, Hmong teenagers in Vikings jerseys and baggy pants text message one another or snap photos with digital cameras. As one Miss Hmong America contestant after another takes the stage, people in the audience wander across the auditorium, catching up with family members and friends.

But no one, I notice, walks into a small section in the front surrounded by a ring of private security guards. In the center of the cordoned-off area sits a Hmong man in his seventies with a bald, bullet-shaped head and black moles dotting his sagging, furrowed face. Dressed in a charcoal suit, he faces the stage, clapping politely as Miss Hmong America wannabes attempt to play traditional wooden instruments.

The old man is named Vang Pao, and, for years, the Hmong have worshipped him. Many believe he has supernatural powers—that he can heal deadly illnesses and cure infertility. Since immigrating to the United States in the mid-'70s, Vang Pao has reigned over the Hmong community, serving as its unelected political representative, adjudicating disputes and receiving supplicants. "One time, I took Vang Pao to see some refugees, and people would show up and they were crying and wanted to touch him," says Rick Wade, who worked with Vang Pao in the '80s and '90s. "It was like Jesus was coming through town."

In the early evening, after watching hours of ballads, Vang Pao steps gingerly to the stage, surrounded by at least ten Hmong men who form a protective bubble around him. Miss Hmong America contestants with glued-on grins stare as he unleashes a fiery speech, bellowing into the microphone, exhorting the Hmong to take more pride in themselves and their culture.

In his rambling, 20-minute-long sermon, Vang Pao never mentions a topic still on many audience members' minds: All the victims of the violent incidents had some connection to Vang Pao. Xang Vang is an old friend. Cha Vang is his son. Vang Pao himself helped found Lao Family Community. Behind me, I notice several younger Hmong get up and head for the doors. "That man should get down," I hear one say. "He's the trouble."

VIENTIANE, CAPITAL OF the tiny Southeast Asian nation of Laos, hardly seems like a national capital. Just outside the center of town, water buffalo graze in terraced rice fields resembling layered wedding cakes. In the low-rise downtown, Buddhist temples inlaid with gold leaf and gems tower over the blocky, Stalinist modern buildings built by the Communist government after it took power in 1975. By early evening, the city goes dark; three-wheeled taxis putter through the back alleys, and an occasional Western backpacker tosses back a bottle of Beerlao.

North of Vientiane, in the fog-shrouded mountains separating Laos from southern China, the Hmong historically lived an even more isolated existence. Today, only occasional strips of tarmac run through northern Laos. Modern development has barely intruded, and few towns exist amid hills covered in thick jungle foliage and dotted with limestone cliffs and thin dirt footpaths. In these remote hills, the Hmong lived for decades in small clans dominated by elders and shamans. Few had connections to the outside world; most family groups farmed, planting subsistence crops like rice. Some families raised an occasional pig or chicken.

But Laos also borders Vietnam, and, in the '50s and '60s, the wars in Southeast Asia crossed the border, disrupting the Hmong's isolated existence. As North Vietnam built the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos and developed a close alliance with Lao Communists, the United States looked for potential allies and secretly expanded the Vietnam war into Laos. The Hmong, who feared the lowland Laotians dominating the Communist leadership, seemed a natural friend. Across northern Laos, the CIA launched a massive covert operation. U.S. planes began dropping rifles and mortars to the Hmong, and CIA advisers moved into the mountains to train them in modern warfare.

To make their plan work, the CIA needed to find one Hmong leader. In a society with virtually no educated men, they did not have a wealth of choices. But Vang Pao had studied military tactics with the French, the former colonial power. The CIA chose Vang Pao, giving him leadership of a Hmong army of 30,000 men and spending millions to equip

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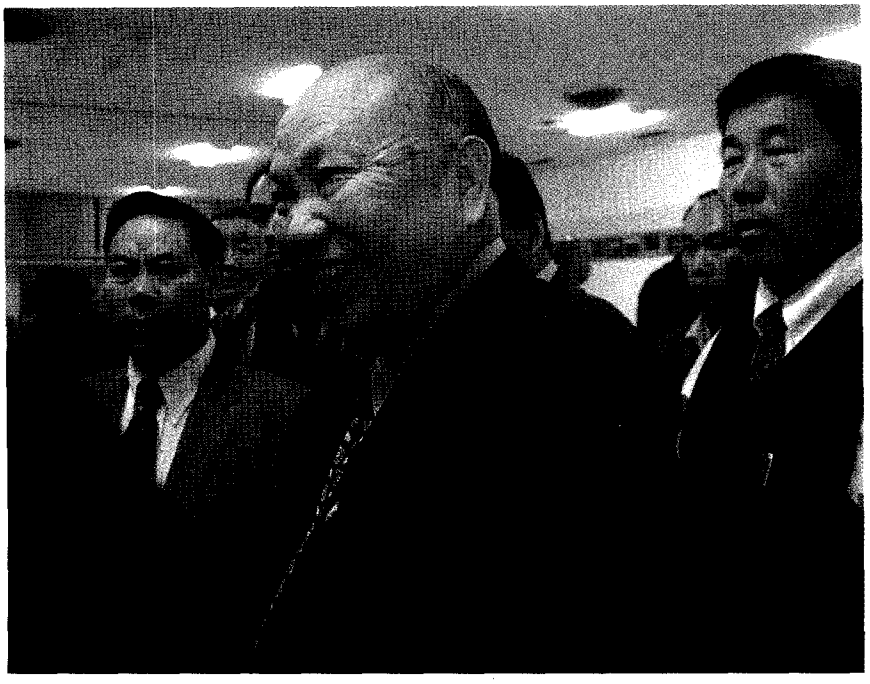

Vang Pao, a god among Hmong.

his force. "We helped create him," says Vint Lawrence, a former CIA agent who lived in Laos with Vang Pao. (After the war, Lawrence joined THE NEW REPUBLIC as a contributing artist.) "He had talent, but the agency built him."

Vang Pao soon surpassed the CIA's expectations. The Hmong suffered enormous casualties—by 1975, as much as one-third of their population in northern Laos had died from war or disease—but Vang Pao distinguished himself as a brilliant military strategist, winning victory after victory against the powerful North Vietnamese. "Vang Pao was a leader like no one else," says Lawrence. Other men who fought with Vang Pao described him running into the face of heavy North Vietnamese bombing to lead his army. "I've never met a leader with more charisma," says one of his former associates. "He spoke with incredible authority, such force. He could convince anyone." Vang Pao also showed he could be brutal when necessary. He allegedly rubbed out enemies within the Hmong, repeatedly crushing internal coups.

Still, when the United States pulled out of Indochina, Washington airlifted only a few thousand Hmong from Laos, including Vang Pao, and recognized the Communist government in Vientiane. Desperate to avoid reprisal murders by the Lao government, many Hmong fled to Thailand and eventually straggled to the United States as refugees, often relying on Vang Pao and his assistants to help them. It was a reliance that would become entrenched.

THE DAY AFTER Hmong New Year, I park outside a regentrifying section of downtown St. Paul and walk into a luxurious apartment with high ceilings and decorated with Buddha sculptures and other Southeast Asian antiques. Stephen Young sits in the apartment's office room, which is stocked floor-to-ceiling with books on Asia. After the Hmong began arriving in the United States in the '70s, Young became Vang Pao's close friend. Young's father had served as ambassador to Thailand, and Young himself had volunteered to serve in the Vietnam war, where he helped create a uniquely successful village development program and acquired a passionate love for Indochina. Even today, as a successful, erudite, middle-aged former assistant dean at Harvard Law School, Young holds tightly to the past. His face reddens as he condemns the way Washington abandoned the Hmong. "We just didn't want to deal with them," he says.

In the late '70s, Young helped coordinate the resettlement of Hmong refugees and began advising Vang Pao and American officials about how to help the Hmong adapt. Young says he tried to convince the Minnesota government and national leaders to play an active role in guiding the Hmong, not merely hand them welfare and then ignore them. He was rebuffed. "The Hmong were a nonpresence—we were embarrassed by them because we didn't want to talk about the Vietnam war anymore," says Young.

Refugee resettlement specialists knew little about the Hmong's clan structures and history and settled Hmong with historic grievances side by side. "The Hmong had a whole structure of leadership and clans that was totally ignored," Young says. And, unlike some other refugees, the Hmong desperately needed help. Many Vietnamese refugees came from educated Saigon and quickly built businesses in the United States. But the Hmong did not have these modern, capitalist skills. Traumatized by years of war, upon arriving in the United States, they began dying young, dropping dead of unexplained illnesses or killing themselves. Fresno witnessed an epidemic of Hmong suicides, while the Twin Cities suffered outbreaks of Hmong gang violence.

The United States, says Young, could have utilized Vang Pao's leadership skills while also helping the Hmong become more self-sufficient. Instead, the Hmong became more dependent on Vang Pao. "With no one else to help them, what do you expect? Everyone turned to him," agrees Lee Pao Xiong, a Hmong scholar at Concordia University in St. Paul. Vang Pao adjudicated disputes, brokered fights between clan elders, and tried to provide the Hmong with a political voice in the United States. And he continued to live his warlord existence—surrounded by mistresses and aides—first at a Montana ranch allegedly provided by the CIA and then at homes in Fresno and the Twin

AP PHOTO/JANET HOSTETTER

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Cities. "Everyone around him would do anything for him," agrees the former associate. "He demanded absolute loyalty." At meetings with his men, says another former associate, Vang Pao would "sit in a bamboo chair, and people would come up to him and bow before him."

Vang Pao also realized he could continue to lead his fight against Laos from the United States. After the Vietnam war, some Hmong remained in Laos and continued a lonely battle against the Lao government. Although backing combat against countries at peace with Washington is against U.S. law, Vang Pao created an organization to collect money from Hmong in the United States and then allegedly used the funds to try to equip the resistance fighters. Going house to house in Hmong neighborhoods, Vang Pao's men would ask for small contributions, always in cash. "We'd even get money, five bucks, ten bucks, from the poorest old women on welfare," says Tou Long Lo, Vang Pao's former son-in-law. "We'd threaten them. ... People knew that, in Laos, Vang Pao had killed, so threats worked." In exchange for the money, donors would receive certificates promising them positions in a future Lao government.

Washington tolerated Vang Pao, treating him like an exiled head of government and paying little attention to his fund-raising, which was hardly a secret. Vang Pao openly screened videos of rebel armies marching in Laos, and, as the fighting in Laos claimed hundreds if not thousands of lives, he himself traveled to neighboring Thailand to meet fighters. "U.S. officials knew the Hmong were raising money," says Wade. Indeed, Vang Pao remained popular with anti-Communist conservatives, and he traveled to Washington talk shops like the Heritage Foundation, where he told one audience in the '80s that his organization would "mobilize all Laotian people, inside as well as outside of Laos, to overthrow the puppet regime imposed on the Laotian people." According to the *Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune*, which published a three-part investigative series on Vang Pao, his organization collected millions—a significant accomplishment, since the Hmong are the poorest ethnic group in the United States.

On a late November day in 2003, over 700 Hmong and Laotians sympathetic to the anti-Communist charge packed into a Twin Cities convention hall. Before the event, Vang Pao's aides had promised a dramatic announcement. Arriving at the hall, aging veterans of the CIA secret war wondered what their leader would say. Would he release new videos of fighting in Laos or plans to help the remaining Hmong refugees in Thailand come to the United States?

Yet Vang Pao delivered a far more shocking message: After years of battle, he wanted to make peace with the Communist Lao government. "The era of killing must stop," Vang Pao said. "We need to slowly begin new dialogues that will strengthen the nation and the people." Some associates believe Vang Pao genuinely decided the time had come for peace, while others thought there was financial opportunity in settling his score with the Lao government. Either way, many Hmong veterans simply walked out of the meeting. Others stood up to their leader for the first time, dragging the meeting on for six hours as they questioned and debated.

Along with anger at Vang Pao's détente, leading members of the community, some of whom had held grudges against Vang Pao for decades, began openly questioning his fund-raising operation. Vang Pao's son, Cha Vang, had been pushing out the general's old advisers while apparently taking funds for himself. (In 2005, the Minnesota attorney general sued a nonprofit run by Cha Vang for breaking operating laws and taking donations for what may have been personal use. Cha Vang settled, but not before it emerged that he had spent some of the money at a massive jewelry store in Bangkok.)

Several groups split from Vang Pao. These enemies remained in the shadows, but Hmong experts point to followers of another former Hmong resistance leader named Pa Kao Her, who was mysteriously assassinated in Thailand in 2002. (His killer was never caught.) After Pa Kao Her's death, some of his followers claimed Vang Pao had abandoned their cause, and they lashed out at him. The Lao Veterans of America, a hard-line group of former secret war fighters, also cut their ties after Vang Pao's peace speech. Lao Veterans members began holding demonstrations blasting the Lao government and Vang Pao.

The next year, this stew of ancient animosity and modern grievances exploded. At a rally in early April 2004, in front of the St. Paul office of U.S. Representative Betty McCollum, pro– and anti–Vang Pao factions attacked one another. One woman was beaten to the ground with the sign she was holding. Straka, one of the St. Paul police officers most knowledgeable about the Hmong community, began to worry, but noisy protests at Hmong-related political events were not uncommon.

Soon after came the shooting at Xang Vang's house and the Cha Vang arson. As Straka looked closer, he realized that all the attacks seemed to be Hmong-on-Hmong and all revolved in some way around Vang Pao. The police called in the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. "We realized there was so little we actually knew about the politics," Straka says. Vang Pao increased his security protection, fearing an assassination attempt.

By the time a hit list circulated in the Hmong community, Straka believed the violence was linked to a Hmong political struggle. "No one in the community would provide information," he said. The cops finally made one collar—one of their own. They arrested a Hmong officer named Tou Cha and claimed his gun had been used in the shooting at Xang Vang's house. Tou Cha later admitted he'd lent his gun to another man for the shooting, but he offered no motive for the attack and no information on who ordered the hit. "Tou Cha wouldn't tell us anything," Straka says. By the end of the year, the violence had abated, but the 2004 cases remain unsolved.

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News of the Hmong's St. Paul civil war did not seem to have reached American refugee specialists. Thirty years after the Vietnam war, the United States is again bringing war-ravaged refugee groups like the Hmong to the United States and giving them a minimum of support. In 2003, Washington began resettling some 13,000 Somali Bantu, the biggest group of African refugees ever admitted. Like the Hmong, the Bantu historically lived a premodern existence in a war-torn country. The United States also has agreed to resettle thousands of non-Bantu Somalis and Sudanese "Lost Boys," who have come to the United States as unaccompanied minors; and it may, in the future, resettle large numbers of refugees from Iraq. As with the Hmong, Washington often seems unable to recognize that these refugees require more, and different, types of help than someone from China or Eastern Europe. Perhaps predictably, Bantu factions have begun squabbling with one another, and with Somalis. "We've already seen problems [in the United States] between the nomadic Somalis and the Somali Bantu," says Dan Van Lehman, one of the directors of the National Somali Bantu Project at Portland State University, citing fights between nomadic Somalis and Somali Bantu in St. Louis, Buffalo, and parts of Tennessee. And, if Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds all come to the United States from Iraq, one can only imagine what will happen.

On my last day in St. Paul, I meet Vang Pao at the office of one of his associates. Five Hmong men in cheap-looking dark suits and sunglasses sit around him, nodding furiously whenever he seems to be finishing a thought. One aide constantly brings him grainy faxes marked "Urgent" and another aide shows me a photo, from the early '80s, of a dinner for local Hmong leaders before the community turned upon itself. "That was the last supper," the aide says, laughing grimly.

Though he occasionally loses his train of thought, Vang Pao still talks like a military general. He dispenses replies in ten-minute speeches and barks out orders to his subordinates, waving a hand covered in gold rings. And, perhaps because of the pressure from rival Hmong leaders, he has since reversed his position on making peace with the Communist government in Laos. "Why doesn't the U.S. do anything about the Lao Communists?" he says. "The Hmong and me, myself, we were America's best ally during the Vietnam war." Clearly, the old fight still gnaws at him. When I ask if he has one wish left in life, he doesn't think long. "The U.S. has better rifles, better guns than the Communists," he says. "If they give me the guns, I can conquer Laos in 2007. I still believe I can do it."

But, amid the bluster, even Vang Pao seems to realize that the biggest battles he faces aren't overseas anymore, but here at home. Younger Hmong now openly criticize the cult-like leader. When Vang Pao gave a talk to a group of Hmong students, several complained the old warrior understood nothing about the new generation of Hmong-Americans. "I don't believe the younger generation would like to go back [to Laos]," Vang Pao admits to me.

As the hours stretch on and Vang Pao keeps talking, his despair comes closer to the surface, and he constantly predicts a dire end for his people. "It is dark—misery for the future," he tells me, staring at the wall. Finally, I give him the chance to place himself in history. "There will be no one else like me" among the Hmong, he says. "These younger leaders, they do for their own kind, their own group. But nationwide, I doubt it—no one like me." ■

Israel's worst nightmare.

Contra Iran

BY YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI AND MICHAEL B. OREN

The first reports from military intelligence about an Iranian nuclear program reached the desk of Yitzhak Rabin shortly after he became prime minister in May 1992. Rabin's conclusion was unequivocal: Only a nuclear Iran, he told aides, could pose an existential threat to which Israel would have no credible response. But, when he tried to warn the Clinton administration, he met with incredulity. The CIA's assessment—which wouldn't change until 1998—was that Iran's nuclear program was civilian, not military. Israeli security officials felt that the CIA's judgment was influenced by internal U.S. politics and privately referred to the agency as the "CPIA"—"P" for "politicized."

The indifference in Washington helped persuade Rabin that Israel needed to begin preparing for an eventual preemptive strike, so he ordered the purchase of long-range bombers capable of reaching Iran. And he made a fateful political decision: He reversed his ambivalence toward negotiating with the PLO and endorsed unofficial talks being conducted between Israeli left-wingers and PLO officials. Rabin's justification for this about-face was that Israel needed to neutralize what he defined as its "inner circle of threat"—the enemies along its borders—in order to focus on the coming confrontation with Iran, the far more dangerous "outer circle of threat." Rabin's strategy, then, was the exact opposite of the approach recently recommended by the Iraq Study Group: Where James Baker and Lee Hamilton want to engage Iran—even at the cost of downplaying its nuclear ambitions—in order to solve

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crises in the Arab world, Rabin wanted to make peace with the Arab world in order to prevent, at all costs, a nuclear Iran.

Now, more than a decade later, the worst-case scenario envisioned by Rabin is rapidly approaching. According to Israeli intelligence, Iran will be able to produce a nuclear bomb as soon as 2009. In Washington, fear is growing that either Israel or the Bush administration plans to order strikes against Iran. In Israel, however, there is fear of a different kind. Israelis worry not that the West will act rashly, but that it will fail to act at all. And, while strategists here differ over the relative efficacy of sanctions or a military strike, nearly everyone agrees on this point: Israel cannot live with a nuclear Iran.

For over two decades, since the era of former Prime Minister Menachem Begin, the Holocaust was rarely invoked, except on the extremes, in Israeli politics. In recent months, though, the Iranian threat has returned the Final Solution to the heart of Israeli discourse. Senior army commanders, who likely once regarded Holocaust analogies with the Middle East conflict as an affront to Zionist empowerment, now routinely speak of a "second Holocaust." Op-eds, written by left-wing as well as right-wing commentators, compare these times to the 1930s. Israelis recall how the international community reacted with indifference as a massively armed nation declared war against the Jewish people—and they sense a similar pattern today. Even though the United States and Europe have finally awakened to the Iranian nuclear threat, Iran's calls for the destruction of Israel tend to be dismissed as mere rhetoric by the Western news media. Yet, here in Israel, those pronouncements have reinforced Rabin's urgency in placing the Iran situation at the top of the strategic agenda.

One of the men most responsible for doing precisely that is Labor Party parliamentarian and current Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh, whom Rabin entrusted with his government's "Iran file." Like most in the defense establishment, Sneh doesn't believe Iran would immediately launch a nuclear attack against Israel. But, he adds, it won't have to actually use the bomb to cripple Israel. "They would be able to destroy the Zionist dream without pressing the button," he says.

In clipped tones that reveal his long military background, he outlines three repercussions of an Iranian bomb. To begin with, he notes, the era of peace negotiations will come to an end: "No Arab partner will be able to make concessions with a nuclear Iran standing over them." What's more, Israel will find its military options severely limited. An emboldened Iran could provide Hezbollah and Hamas with longer-range and deadlier rockets than their current stock of Katyushas and Qassams; yet, threatened with a nuclear response, Israel would have little defense against intensifying rocket fire on its northern and southern periphery, whose residents would have to be evacuated to the center. Israel already experienced a foretaste of mass uprooting in the Lebanon war last summer, when hundreds of thousands of Galilee residents were turned into temporary refugees. Finally, says Sneh, foreign investors will flee the country, and many Israelis will, too. In one recent poll, 27 percent of Israelis said they would consider leaving if Iran went nuclear. "Who will leave? Those with opportunities abroad—the elite," Sneh notes. The promise of Zionism to create a Jewish refuge will have failed, and, instead, Jews will see the diaspora as a more trustworthy option for both personal and collective survival. During the Lebanon war, Israeli television's preeminent satirical comedy, "O What a Wonderful Land," interviewed an Israeli claiming that "this" is the safest place for Jews—as the camera pulled back to reveal that "this" was London.

Even without the bomb, Iran's threat to Israel is growing. Working through Shia Hezbollah, Alawite Damascus, and Sunni Hamas, Tehran has extended its influence into Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian territories. As a result of Hezbollah's perceived victory in the Lebanon war and Hamas's ability to continue firing rockets at Israeli towns despite repeated army incursions into Gaza, Iran has proved it can attack Israel with near-impunity. Iranian newspapers are replete with stories gloating over the supposed erosion of Israel's will to fight and the imminent collapse of its "postmodern" army, as one recent article put it. Iran's self-confidence has been bolstered by Israel's failure to extract a price from Tehran for instigating the Lebanon war and for funding terrorist operations as far back as the early '90s, when Iran masterminded the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires and, two years later, that city's Jewish community headquarters. Nor has Israel—to say nothing of the U.N. peacekeeping forces—managed to prevent Hezbollah from rearming. And, if Iran manages to overcome U.S. threats and U.N. sanctions and achieve nuclear capability, it will be seen throughout the Muslim world as unstoppable.

A nuclear Iran will have devastating consequences for Sunni Arab states, too. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and, most recently, Jordan have declared their interest in acquiring nuclear power; Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has stated explicitly that Egypt may feel the need to protect itself against Iran's nuclear threat. Other Sunni nations could follow—including Libya, whose enmity toward the Saudis may draw it back into the nuclear race if Riyadh tries to acquire a bomb. A nuclear free-for-all, then, is likely to seize the Middle East. In this crisis-ridden region, any flashpoint will become a potential nuclear flashpoint.

The reverberations of a nuclear Iran will reach far beyond the Middle East. Tehran could dictate the price of oil and even control much of its supply through the Straits of Hermuz. And Iran will be able to conduct terrorist operations through its proxies with greater immunity. Even without the nuclear threat, Iran succeeded in intimidating the Saudis into releasing Iranian suspects in the 1997 Khobar Towers bombing. Moreover, if Tehran goes nuclear, the pretense of an international community capable of enforcing

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world order would quickly unravel: After all, if a regime that has perpetrated terrorist attacks from Argentina to the Persian Gulf can flout sanctions and acquire nuclear weapons, how can the United Nations credibly stop anyone else from doing the same?

AND THESE TERRIFYING scenarios exclude the most terrifying scenario of all: Iran uses its bomb. In a poll, 66 percent of Israelis said they believed Iran would drop a nuclear weapon on the Jewish state. Though defense experts are divided over the likelihood of an Iranian nuclear attack, every strategist we spoke with for this article considered the scenario plausible. "No one knows if Iran would use the bomb or not," says Sneh. "But I can't take the chance."

The threat of a theologically motivated nuclear assault against Israel tends to be downplayed in the West; not so here. The former head of Israel's National Security Council, Giora Eiland, has warned that an apocalyptically driven Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would be willing to sacrifice half his country's population to obliterate the Jewish state. Military men suddenly sound like theologians when explaining the Iranian threat. Ahmadinejad, they argue, represents a new "activist" strain of Shiism, which holds that the faithful can hasten the return of the Hidden Imam, the Shia messiah, by destroying evil. Hebrew University Iranian scholar Eldad Pardo goes further, arguing that the ideology founded by Ayatollah Khomeini represents nothing less than a "new religion," combining Shia, Sunni, and Marxist beliefs and resembling Western messianic cults that have advocated mass suicide. And so Ahmadinejad's pronouncements about the imminent return of the Hidden Imam and the imminent destruction of Israel aren't regarded as merely calculated for domestic consumption; they are seen as glimpses into an apocalyptic game plan. Ahmadinejad has reportedly told his Cabinet that the Hidden Imam will reappear in 2009—precisely the date when Israel estimates Iran will go nuclear. In a recent meeting with outgoing U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Iranian president predicted that, while the United States and Great Britain won the last world war, Iran will win the next one. And, two weeks ago, an Iranian government website declared that the Hidden Imam would defeat his archenemy in a final battle in Jerusalem. Notes one former top-ranking Israeli defense official: "We may not yet have located a clear theological line connecting the dots, but there are a great many dots." At least one ayatollah, though, has made that theology explicit: In 2005, Hussein Nuri Hamdani declared that "the Jews should be fought against and forced to surrender to prepare the way for the coming of the Hidden Imam."

Defense experts readily acknowledge that Ahmadinejad is hardly all-powerful and must yield to the Council of Guardians. In recent elections, almost all the clerics allied with Ahmadinejad lost; and, in an unprecedented move, 150 Iranian parliamentarians signed a letter blaming the president for growing inflation and unemployment. But none of this reassures Israelis. That's because Ahmadinejad is hardly alone in conjuring doomsday scenarios. In February 2006, clerics in Qom issued a fatwa permitting nuclear war. And former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, speaking at a 2001 "Jerusalem Day" rally, declared: "If, one day, the Islamic world is also equipped with weapons like those that Israel possesses now, then the imperialists' strategy will reach a standstill, because the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything. However, it will only harm the Islamic world. It is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality."

GIVEN THESE NIGHTMARISH scenarios, one would expect to find a mood of near-despair within the Israeli defense establishment. Yet senior officials believe that events are actually working in Israel's favor and that, one way or another, Iran's nuclear program can still be stopped. Partly, that is because Israel's assessments of Iran's intention to acquire nuclear weapons have finally been accepted not only by Washington but even by the Europeans. After years of isolation on the Iranian issue, Israelis are basking in a rare moment of international credibility.

As a result, some in the defense establishment are convinced that the military option can still be forestalled, even at this late date, by aggressive economic sanctions, forcing the Iranian regime to choose between its nuclear program and domestic stability. To be sure, even the most optimistic Israelis believe that the recent U.N. decision to impose minimal sanctions on Iran will prove ineffective. Indeed, those sanctions—intended to prevent nuclear materials and know-how from reaching Iran and to stop its nuclear program from becoming self-sufficient—are uniformly dismissed as coming at least two years too late, since Iran is rapidly approaching nuclear self-sufficiency and, some here believe, may have already reached that point.

But sanctions advocates do believe that, by formally placing Iran in the category of "threat to international peace," the United Nations has tacitly empowered the United States and its allies to pursue more aggressive sanctions that could trigger Iranian instability—such as the Bush administration's quiet efforts over the last year to force foreign banks out of Tehran. Combined with Iran's preexisting social and economic problems—massive hidden unemployment, widespread corruption, and growing drug addiction and prostitution—and hatred for the regime among students and the middle class, aggressive sanctions could, some Israelis believe, hasten regime change in Tehran by forcing the Iranian people to pay the price for their leaders' provocations. And, with regime change, of course, the threat posed by an Iranian bomb would ease: After all, the problem isn't the nuclearization of Iran but the nuclearization of *this* Iran. The very threat of additional sanctions has already led to drastic increases in food and housing prices in Tehran—and may have emboldened those parliamentarians who signed the recent protest letter to Ahmadinejad.

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"The Iranians are a very proud people," says one Israeli official with years of experience inside Iran. "They won't be able to bear being turned into pariahs, and that will increase their resentment toward the regime."

Along with sanctions, some Israeli officials call for a robust but nonviolent U.S. intervention in internal Iranian politics—funding the Iranian opposition, transforming U.S. broadcasts in Farsi into "Radio Free Iran," reaching Farsi audiences through the Internet, and more aggressively challenging the Iranian government on its human rights abuses. Israeli advocates of regime change have been pressing Washington to adopt these policies for years and can't understand why even the Bush administration has demurred. "No one is saying not to plan for military action," says the official with experience in Iran. "But, given the devastating consequences of a military strike, why aren't we giving this a chance?"

Skeptics of sanctions note that the time frame is too narrow and the stakes too high for Israel to place its hopes on long-term regime change. They insist that the international community is incapable of mounting effective sanctions, which would almost certainly be violated by Russia and China. Yes, they acknowledge, the ayatollahs' regime is in trouble and will eventually fall—but not soon enough. Indeed, optimists have been predicting imminent regime change for over a decade; and, when failed reformer Mohammed Khatami became president in 1997, some in the West declared that regime change had already begun. But Iran's leaders know how to defend themselves against opponents: When bus drivers organized a wildcat strike last year, the leader was arrested and his tongue was cut off.

For those Israelis who are skeptical of sanctions, there is the option of last resort: a military strike. Experts readily acknowledge the complexity of an attack against Iran's nuclear facilities, since they are scattered over dozens of sites, many heavily fortified and deep underground. But an attack on three key sites—especially the uranium-enrichment facility at Natanz—would set back Iranian plans by several years. It would not be necessary, the former top-ranking defense official says, to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities: By repeatedly hitting their entrances, the sites could be rendered inaccessible. At the same time, Israel would probably bomb key government installations, like Revolutionary Guard bases, to weaken the regime's ability to recover. While the Iranian people are likely to initially rally around the government, the combined effect of a military attack and economic sanctions could trigger an eventual uprising, suggests the former defense official. Periodic air strikes, he adds, would impede attempts to rebuild the nuclear sites.

Defense experts downplay the possibility of secret facilities unknown to Western intelligence agencies. "If we can locate a suicide bomber as he moves from place to place, then we know how to locate static targets, even deep underground," says the former defense official. Nor are those facilities as impenetrable as some foreign news reports suggest. Noted Yuval Steinitz, former chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee: "The Iranians are signaling us that the nuclear project is vulnerable. Whoever spends several billion dollars just for anti-aircraft systems around nuclear sites is saying that those sites are vulnerable. There would be no need to invest those sums if their bunkers were deep enough [to avoid an air strike]."

The Israeli air force has been actively preparing for an attack since 1993, enhancing the range of its bombers and acquiring the requisite bunker-busting ordnance. "Technically, we have the ability" to strike key facilities, a former commander of the air force told us. While the army's reputation was battered during the Lebanon war, the air force, by contrast, performed well, routinely destroying Hezbollah's long-range missile sites within less than five minutes following a launch.

Despite a recent report in the London *Sunday Times* that Israel is planning a tactical nuclear attack on Iran's nuclear sites, Israel will almost certainly not introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East battlefield. The story, likely planted and then promptly denied, was probably part of an ongoing Israeli attempt to accomplish two objectives: to warn the international community that, if it fails to stop Iran through sanctions, then "crazy Israel" will be unleashed; and to prevent the Iranian crisis from turning into an Israeli issue alone.

An Israeli assault could only delay Iran's nuclear program, not eliminate it. That's because Israel cannot sustain an air campaign against such remote targets for days on end. This can only be accomplished by the United States, perhaps together with NATO allies, by mounting an ongoing series of air strikes similar to the "shock and awe" campaign conducted against Iraq at the beginning of the war. Israelis, though, are divided over the likelihood of U.S. military action. Some experts believe President Bush will attack, if only to prevent being recorded by history as a leader who fought the wrong war while failing to fight the right one. Others speculate that a politically devastated Bush will leave the resolution of the Iranian crisis to his successor.

If Israel is forced, by default, to strike, it is likely to happen within the next 18 months. An attack needs to take place before the nuclear facilities become radioactive; waiting too long could result in massive civilian casualties. Still, Israel will almost certainly wait until it becomes clear that sanctions have failed and that the United States or NATO won't strike. The toughest decision, then, will be timing: determining that delicate moment when it becomes clear that the international community has failed but before the facilities turn lethal.

Israel will alert Washington before a strike: "We won't surprise the Americans, given the likelihood of Iranian reprisals against American troops in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East," says an analyst close to the intelligence community. U.S. permission will be needed if Israel chooses to send its planes over Iraqi air space—and the expectation

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here is that permission would be granted. (Israel has two other possible attack routes, both problematic: over Turkish air space and along the Saudi-Iraqi border to the Persian Gulf.) Still, according to the former air force commander, if Israel decides to act, "We will act alone, not as emissaries of anyone else."

Regardless of whether Israeli or other Western forces carry out the strike, Iran will almost certainly retaliate against the Jewish state. Experts disagree, though, about the extent of the Iranian onslaught and Israel's ability to withstand it. Some say that, though Iranian missiles will strike Israeli cities and Hezbollah Katyushas and Hamas Qassams will fall in massive numbers, Israel's anti-ballistic and civil defense systems, combined with its retaliatory capability, will suffice to contain the threat. Optimists also downplay Iran's ability to mount terrorist attacks in the West: September 11 has produced an unprecedented level of cooperation among Western intelligence services, and they are monitoring sleeper cells as well as Iranian diplomats, who are believed to have used their privileged access to smuggle explosives.

The pessimists' scenario, though, is daunting. Not only could Iranian missiles—perhaps carrying chemical warheads—devastate Israeli cities, but, if the Syrians join in, then thousands of additional long-range missiles will fall, too. And, if Israel retaliates by bombing Damascus, that could trigger public demands in other Arab countries to join the war against Israel. The result could be a *conventional* threat to Israel's existence.

That scenario leads some in the security establishment to call for renewed peace talks with Syria, aimed at removing it from the pro-Iranian front. The growing debate over Syria positions the Mossad—which says it's no longer possible to separate Damascus from Tehran—against military intelligence, which believes that President Bashar Assad wants negotiations with Israel, if only to divert the threat of sanctions against Damascus for its alleged role in murdering Lebanese leaders.

There is no debate among Israelis, however, about the wisdom of negotiations between the West and Iran. That, defense officials agree, would be the worst of all options. Negotiations that took place now would be happening at a time when Iran feels ascendant: The time to have negotiated with Iran, some say, was immediately after the initial U.S. triumph in Iraq, not now, when the United States is losing the war. Under these circumstances, negotiations would only buy the regime time to continue its nuclear program. Talks would create baseless hope, undermining the urgency of sanctions. And resuming negotiations with the Iranian regime—despite its repeated bad faith in previous talks over its nuclear program—would send the wrong message to the Iranian people: that the regime has international legitimacy and that resisting it is futile.

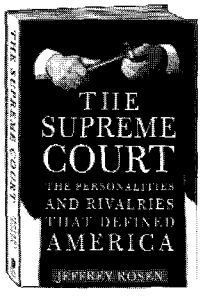
HOVERING OVER ISRAELI discourse about a nuclear Iran is the recent Holocaust-denial conference in Tehran—and what Israelis regard as the scandalously inadequate international response. While the conference was condemned in the West, Israelis expected the international community to treat it as something more than a bizarre sideshow. Indeed, for Israelis, the conference offered the clearest warning yet on the true nature of the Iranian threat to the Jewish state.

In denying the Holocaust, Ahmadinejad aims to undermine what he believes to be the sole justification for Israel's existence. In the years before World War II, Nazi propagandists prepared Europe for the Final Solution by dehumanizing the Jews; now, Ahmadinejad is preparing the Muslim world for the destruction of the Jewish state by delegitimizing its history. And not just the Muslim world: Holocaust denial is also aimed at the West, which many Muslims believe supports Israel only because of Holocaust guilt. Strip away that guilt, and Israel is defenseless. "The resolution of the Holocaust issue will end in the destruction of Israel," commented Mohammad Ali Ramin, head of a new Iranian government institute devoted to Holocaust denial.

The French philosopher André Glucksmann has noted that, by threatening to destroy Israel and by attaining the means to do so, Iran violates the twin taboos on which the post–World War II order was built: never again Auschwitz; never again Hiroshima. The international community now has an opportunity to uphold that order. If it fails, then Israel will have no choice but to uphold its role as refuge of the Jewish people. A Jewish state that allows itself to be threatened with nuclear weapons—by a country that denies the genocide against Europe's six million Jews while threatening Israel's six million Jews—will forfeit its right to speak in the name of Jewish history. Fortunately, even the government of Ehud Olmert, widely criticized as incompetent and corrupt, seems to understand that, on this issue at least, it cannot fail. ■

Congratulations
To our friend and colleague
Jeffrey Rosen on his new book,
THE SUPREME COURT:
The Personalities and Rivalries that Defined America

Rosen's book has just been published by Times Books/Henry Holt. David Garrow in *American History Magazine* praises it as "superbly well written . . . a wonderfully informative guide to the Supreme Court both past and present." The book is a companion volume to a PBS series on the Supreme Court airing nationwide on January 31 and February 7.



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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Selves Discovered

LOVELY AMONG FILM'S POWERS, yet relatively unsung, is its relation to children—not children in the audience but those on screen. Something about performing before a camera comforts a child's natural instinct to pretend. Of course all children play and pretend in one way or another, but the wonder is how, without knowledge and often without ambition, a child will behave on a movie set like a pro. This isn't even necessarily true of those children whose parents want them to be film stars. An extraordinary performance can come from a child without any subsequent career, such as the little girl in *La Maternelle* (1932). The viewer is left wondering what happened to such a child in later life. Did she remember, as she wrapped groceries or did appendectomies, or lay sodden in a bar, that she had once moved thousands—in fact, still moves them?

THE ITALIAN
(Sony Pictures Classics)

NOTES ON A SCANDAL
(Fox Searchlight)

What about Kolya Spiridonov? This six-year-old boy plays the leading role, the mainstay role, in a new Russian film called **THE ITALIAN**. Kolya has already been in several other films (unseen here), but there is no child-star quality about him. How did he create the thoughtful, oddly private performance that he gives in *The Italian*? Martin Ritt once told me, when I asked him how he got good performances from the children in *Conrack*, that it was a director's job to woo and win the confidence of child actors. Andrei Kravchuk directed *The Italian*; did he, in Ritt's sense, woo and win Kolya? Very possibly, but does that really account for the relative depth of this child's acting? Why did he *want* to do it well? Pleasing his parents and massaging his ego and being praised, yes, but where did he find the sheer understanding? It seems fitting to fantasize: the camera speaks a secret attractive language to certain children who comprehend and respond. If so, it is a conversation that the camera and the child can keep secret from all the grown-ups around.

That collaboration begins in *The Italian* in a Russian orphan asylum. The adoption of Russian orphans by foreigners is now, as in some other countries, a thriving business. To this provincial orphanage come an amiable Italian couple, and out of all the youngsters offered they choose six-year-old Vanya (played by Kolya). When we meet him, we feel that we would do the same. The adoption money is settled, but because of legal procedures and paperwork, it will be two months before the couple can have him. The film takes place in those two months, during which all the other children in the asylum call Vanya "the Italian."

But all is not joyous anticipation with him. He now has questions about who he is, who his mother is, and he knows he will never be able to find out after he leaves. His questions are sadly deepened when he meets a distraught young woman who left her child in the asylum a few years ago and now wants only to see him. She fails; and there is a grim result to her frustrated search, which helps to heighten Vanya's need to find his mother. He has a clue, and he escapes from the asylum to follow it up, becoming a kind of Dickensian waif out in the twenty-first-century world. The ending, too, is Dickensian.

Andrei Kravchuk here makes his feature-directing debut and shows that there is no reason not to have bright hopes for him. Besides his work with Vanya-Kolya, he uses the numerous other youngsters in the asylum like an unobtrusive choreographer, and he paints in all the film's necessary touches simply. For instance, one plot strand concerns a teenage hooker, apparently the daughter or sister of the asylum janitor, who teaches Kolya how to read. Kravchuk does nothing to underscore the misery of the girl's life; it is simply supplied. A word, too, about the crystalline cinematography of Alexander Burov, who has done several films with the highly esteemed Alexander Sokurov. Burov's camera helps to keep the film well this side of arrant tear-jerking.

Notes on **NOTES ON A SCANDAL**. Right along with *Venus* comes another film that leans on the English theater. The director of *Notes*, Richard Eyre, was for ten years the head of the Royal National Theatre. He is richly experienced in film, too—*Iris*, for example. Judi Dench, who played Iris, is here again with Eyre. Bill Nighy, now visiting Broadway, is also in the film, flavoring it with character. Cate Blanchett, who is Australian in fact but is also a theater figure in England, is abundantly present. The screenplay, adapted from a novel by Zoë Heller, is by the noted English playwright Patrick Marber.

Put them all together and the result is bound to be what it is: crisp, subtly inflected, exquisitely timed, and tinged with a quality that is almost an English hallmark—emotion that is often conveyed in a sort of confidence, as if we were privileged to be shown so much feeling.

The polish and precision of the acting and directing, along with the burnished dialogue, are what keep this film alive. The story as such is predictable fairly soon; but we are so pleased to be in such good professional company that it doesn't greatly matter. Dench plays a history teacher in a middle school who is a closet lesbian. Blanchett is an art teacher with flowing blonde locks, who floats somewhat provocatively among a lot of adolescent boys. Nighy is her husband, patient and affectionate and the father of their two children, one of whom is developmentally disabled. This is a somewhat heavy stroke to make Blanchett sympathetic despite the trouble she gets into.

That trouble is an affair that Blanchett finds herself in—a surprise to her because it is with a fifteen-year-old student. He is a boy of some brightness and drawing tal-

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ent, which, for Blanchett, partly licenses her doings with him. Dench discovers the affair and is not only shocked but jealous. Much of the first part of the film gives us Dench's thoughts on the sound track, always phrased with bite and discomfiting insight. Not quite intentionally, Dench becomes Blanchett's confidante, which helps to produce complications.

Dench's performance is exactly what we would expect, which is meant as a high compliment. Nighy is fine, though his role doesn't quite make the most of him. The welcome surprise is Blanchett. Her past work has usually seemed more intelligent than achieved, well planned but just satisfactorily executed. Here she breaks through into vibrant colors that are strong, even occasionally frightening. We can guess that the skilled Richard Eyre was of considerable help to her. (By the way, as with Penélope Cruz in *Volver*, there is a shot of Blanchett on the toilet. Is this becoming a signet of female stardom?)

Philip Glass wrote the score. It doesn't matter. ■

JED PERL ON ART

Laissez-Faire Aesthetics

What money is doing to art, or how the art world lost its mind.

I.

THE ART WORLD HAS NEVER been so well-oiled a machine as it is right now. Auction records are toppled practically every month, the big international contemporary art fairs have produced a new breed of high-end shopaholics, and in New York's West Twenties the crowds streaming through the galleries are the most elegant on earth. This art scene, which has been fattened and massaged and emboldened by a boisterous stock market, is certainly a spectacle. So it's no wonder that last fall both *Vanity Fair* and *W* got on the bandwagon, devoting special issues to the visual arts. In a *Vanity Fair* feature on "the auction mystique, the new collectors, and the passion driving it all," Tobias Meyer, who is with Sotheby's, argues that the nosebleed prices being paid for new work in the auction rooms reflect a "democracy of access." What Meyer regards as a democratic principle will strike others as an old-fashioned overheated free-market economy. *Vanity Fair*'s editors seem quite taken with this pay-as-you-go democratic spirit: they find another example in the video portraits that Robert Wilson, the stage designer, is now offering to anybody who can cough up $150,000, a sum that the magazine says "is peanuts in today's through-the-roof art market." As a come-on, Wilson has done something rather undemocratic, turning out videos of movie stars, among them Brad Pitt, who landed on the cover of *Vanity Fair* with Wilson's ah-sweet-mystery blue light playing over his bare torso and white boxer shorts.

LISA YUSKAVAGE
(David Zwirner Gallery)

JOHN CURRIN
(Gagosian Gallery)

ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH

BOB DYLAN'S AMERICAN JOURNEY
(The Morgan Library and Museum)

FERNANDO BOTERO
(Marlborough Gallery)

Of course it didn't take the fall of 2006 to tell us that big money likes flash-in-the-pan art, or that we are in a period—and it's certainly not the first one—when art and fashion and Hollywood are often indistinguishable. Amid the gold-rush atmosphere of recent months, however, something very strange has emerged, something more pertinent to art than to money—a new attitude, now pervasive in the upper echelons of the art world, about the meaning and experience and value of art itself. A great shift has occurred. This has deep and complex origins; but when you come right down to it, the attitude is almost astonishingly easy to grasp. We have entered the age of laissez-faire aesthetics.

The people who are buying and selling the most highly priced contemporary art right now—think of them as the laissez-faire aesthetes—believe that any experience that anyone can have with a work of art is equal to any other. They imagine that the most desirable work of art is the one that inspires a range of absolutely divergent meanings and impressions almost simultaneously. I used to be bemused when Lisa Yuskavage, whose lesbo-bimbo figure paintings were featured at the David Zwirner Gallery in October, was praised for channeling, all at once, Disney cartoons and Giovanni Bellini's altarpieces. And I did not comprehend how admirers of John Currin, who defies accusations of misogyny by making the men in his paintings every bit as repulsive as the women, could believe that he is both the direct descendant of Cranach the Elder and a raunchy comic in the *Mad* magazine tradition. My problem, I now realize, is not only that I am looking for consistency, it is that I persist in imagining that there is such a thing as inconsistency. The paintings by Currin and Yuskavage that are now going for hundreds of thousands of dollars are engineered for an audience that believes that a work of art can satisfy radically disparate and even contradictory attitudes and appetites, and satisfy them consecutively or concurrently—it hardly matters. A painting is simply what everybody or anybody says it is, what everybody or anybody wishes it to be.

The collectors who made sure that John Currin's show in November at the Gagosian Gallery on Madison Avenue was sold out even before it opened believe that it is their privilege to respond to anything at any time in any way they choose. When they hang a Currin on the wall, they are given permission—more than that, they are given the right—to appreciate this oilcloth horror as a painterly painting as exquisite as a Velázquez, or to enjoy it as an incompetent high-kitsch send-up of classical

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painting, or to assess its value as social commentary, or to laugh at it as a piece of Dadaist stupidity-for-stupidity's-sake. Or they may enjoy their Currin as a financial trophy pure and simple, proof of their buying power. Or they may regard it as an object of delectation, in much the way that they have been instructed by some art-historian-turned-art-consultant to enjoy a Bonnard. They can have it every way. They experience no conflict. And Currin gives them enough cunningly mixed signals that the possibilities seem endless. It hardly matters that what Currin doesn't know about figure painting would fill volumes, since his collectors know even less, if that is possible. (What precisely is it that Currin doesn't know? For starters, he does not understand that volume in representational painting can be—and to some degree, must be—generated through the power of contour as a two-dimensional expression of three-dimensional experience.)

I recognize that the taste for Currin and Yuskavage is in part a continuation of developments that are now a generation old. The what-the-hell attitude with which the new high-end consumers of art confront the whole question of meaning will strike some as reminiscent of the mentality of a number of collectors in the early 1960s. Back then, there was a whole group of big spenders who were turning their attention from Abstract Expressionism to Pop Art and boasting about how much fun they were having now that they had sloughed off the serious themes of the mid-century abstractionists. And it is hard not to see the in-your-face kitsch of Currin and Yuskavage as an extension of the ironic fascination with incompetence that gave birth to the movement known as "Bad" Painting, which was kicked off in 1978 by a show of that name at the New Museum, organized by Marcia Tucker.

Yet there are differences between garbage then and garbage now. Pop Art and "Bad" Painting were self-consciously ironic; they depended on the existence of a standard that was being mocked or from which one was registering a dissent. Irony, even in the whatever-the-market-will-bear forms that it often assumed in the 1980s and 1990s, was generally accompanied by at least the afterglow of a moral viewpoint. The artists were mocking something. They had a target. *This* is what has now changed. Laissez-faire aesthetics makes a mockery of nothing. Even irony is too much of an idea. It treats everything equally. David Zwirner, the dealer who in recent months has sent Yuskavage's reputation into the stratosphere, has observed in an open letter to the artist that "frankly, I am not sure what your work is about." He makes this declaration without any embarrassment. And while Zwirner does hasten to add that the paintings are "utterly sincere," I am left with the gathering suspicion that the meaning of the work is designed to be unresolved, that the work is meant to register as noncommittal, at least from the audience's point of view. This promiscuity can be regarded, I suppose, as a sort of "democracy of access." Transcendence and stupidity, formal perfection and kitsch: it's all just part of the same big expensive banquet.

II.

THE ART WORLD IS IN MANY respects an insular place. The preoccupations of the most gifted painters and sculptors, when they are alone in their studios, are with tradition and innovation, and can by their very nature never be fully appreciated by a broad swath of the public. Even the most highly touted goings-on in the art world, such as the emergence of an art star like Yuskavage, are the product of forces that the public can scarcely understand. When contemporary art does electrify the public, which is surely the case right now, the art itself is often part of an urban spectacle, a trophy floating atop the cultural maelstrom, and there can be no question that the blissed-out atmosphere in the Chelsea galleries this season has everything to do with New York's emergence as the ultimate amusement park for sophisticated tourists around the globe. On West 19th Street, even as Yuskavage's show opened in the greatly expanded David Zwirner Gallery, you could see, right across the street, the finishing touches being put on Frank Gehry's first freestanding building in New York, Barry Diller's InterActiveCorp. It did not take much of an imagination to make a connection between Yuskavage's ballooning babes and the billowing translucent skin of Gehry's office building. This is the shape of the art-and-design carnival in 2007.

One of the strange facts of our time is that although Picasso and Mondrian and Pollock are household names, the middle-class public has never entirely accepted modern art, never fully embraced its mystery and its magic. Even in the face of this deep distrust, however, the public has assimilated the old bohemian belief in a community of artists as a sort of freely established aristocracy, perhaps seeing here another version of the "democracy of access." This past fall, as exhibitions by big-name artists opened in the galleries and museums in rapid-fire succession, the reporting in the newspapers and magazines was all gossipy enthusiasm, as if the journalists were courtiers at some new-fangled Versailles. At the Museum of Modern Art, there was a Brice Marden retrospective, and the artist himself was catnip for the paparazzi, aging but still handsome in the role of everybody's favorite lonesome cowboy, a minimalist now turned maximalist whose strongest paintings remain a few two-color canvases, in milky greens and blues and grays, that he did in the first flush of his fame, in the early 1970s.

The art world, which in the old days of Warhol and Studio 54 was the place you went to get away from your family, has become a family affair. Among the offerings during the whirlwind of Art Basel Miami Beach were visits to the Wynwood neighborhood, where the Rubell Family Collection was open to the public. In a *New York Times Magazine* profile, Mera Rubell commented of the way that she and her husband Don and her daughter Jennifer and her son Jason and his wife Michelle collect art together that "the fighting, the agreeing, the resolution, it's all relevant." Perhaps the collectors are taking a lesson or two from the new family-friendly artists. One of Marden's daughters, Mirabelle, co-directs a much-discussed New York art gallery, Rivington Arms. Kiki Smith, whose dumb-beyond-belief Whitney show was full of the sort of neo-hippie baubles I wouldn't buy at Target for $14.95, has built a career out of the fact that her father was the sculptor Tony Smith, a friend of Pollock's whose hard-edged vision is now seen as critical in the move from the "hot" 1950s to the "cool" 1960s. And speaking of '60s cool, in a show at the Jewish Museum this season Alex Katz brought together five decades of his portraits of his wife Ada, the queen of downtown high-bohemian chic. As for the older artists, they are presented as nutty great-aunts and -uncles: Robert Rauschenberg exhibited a series of ut-

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terly perfunctory photo-transfer paintings at PaceWildenstein in November, which were perhaps being passed off as the work of an ultra-cool King Lear.

The big galleries don't do shows anymore, they do coronations and requiems. Larry Gagosian has perfected this style. His exhibition spaces are so extraordinarily scaled that on the rare occasions when the art is really good, as was the case with the David Smith show "Personnage" last spring, the grandiosity can feel genuine. But when the coronation is for John Currin, the corruption is almost unbearable. I have not found the art world this depressing since I attended the press preview for "The Art of the Motorcycle," at the Guggenheim back in 1998. And when the requiem is for Andy Warhol, whose late work was the subject of "Cast a Cold Eye," an immense two-gallery show at Gagosian's spaces on West 24th and West 21st Streets, the bombast is simply bewildering. There were Maos and skulls and hammers-and-sickles and camouflage patterns and sketchy renditions of Leonardo's *Last Supper*, some more than twenty feet wide. When Warhol died, it was generally agreed that his late work wasn't much, but the art world knows exactly what to do when a name-brand artists exits with excess inventory on hand, and so the critical upgrading has been inexorable. The huge Warhol retrospective at the Modern in 1989 was a turning point for late Warhol, and now these hollow monoliths are cult objects for the baby boomers. They prove, much like the paintings that de Kooning did after his imagination had been overtaken by Alzheimer's, that there is always a future in becoming a gaga hipster grandpa.

Warhol, of course, is the Moses who first saw the Promised Land of laissez-faire aesthetics. Back in 1982, when Ingrid Sischy was the editor of *Artforum*, she published an issue dedicated to art-and-fashion synergy that had a dress by Issey Miyake on the cover and a centerfold of Warhol dollar signs. It has been downhill all the way since then, and Sischy, who helped out on *Vanity Fair*'s art issue this fall, hasn't missed much. If Warhol had to die before the art world could go completely to hell, it is surely because his amorality was too deeply stamped with the old morality. But no such qualms darken the thoughts of the artists whom *New York* magazine recently profiled in a cover story called "Warhol's Children." One of these clowns does collages incorporating his own semen, much as Warhol had his friends and hangers-on piss on canvases to create his "Oxidation" series.

Warhol is the evil prophet of the profit motive. His portraits of Chairman Mao can look positively visionary at a time when container ships full of neo–Pop Art are emerging from China. Warhol was everywhere this season, not only in the galleries but also at Barneys, where there was an Andy-themed holiday catalog, Andy shopping bags, and limited-edition gift certificates with Andy images. I don't especially mind Andy at Barneys. Warhol began his life doing advertising for high-end fashion retailers, and we could count ourselves fortunate if the damage that he did was limited to Barneys.

COURTESY DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK

LISA YUSKAVAGE, *Changing*, 2005

AMONG THE CHELSEA DEALERS with palatial settings and the instinct for a coronation, Matthew Marks stands out as the man with some taste. Although it may be that for the time being we have seen enough of Ken Price's sensuously shimmering clay sculptures, the aplomb with which Marks presented Price's work in October left a gallerygoer with a champagne high. And in a season when Chelsea has been overrun with artists who are under the delusion that you can make an interesting abstract painting by jumbling together everything and the kitchen sink, it was a pleasure to re-acquaint oneself with Ellsworth Kelly's imperial austerity, new and old, in a Matthew Marks extravaganza that opened in November in three locations. The accusation can be made that Kelly remains too much the captive of a relatively small reservoir of ideas that he developed in the 1950s and 1960s, but I am certainly always glad to see those early works, including a group of black and white drawings that comprised one-third, the smallest third, of what Matthew Marks had to show. The new paintings at Marks are all made of two panels, with the panels painted a single color and then superimposed to create a sort of shallow relief. On West 24th Street, the panels were rectangles in brilliant colors, and piled atop one another they exuded a semaphore-like power. On West 22nd Street, the panels were black and white, and I was especially taken with two vertical works in which the tension between a single curved edge and a single angled edge

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yielded visual music, as if two strings had been plucked to create two sonorous sounds.

Kelly's tripleheader was a real event, not a media event. The same can be said of Lucian Freud's show at Acquavella in November. I have never been an ardent admirer of Freud's figurative style, and I think such hard-bitten journalistic power as his paintings once had has been diffused in the work of the past twenty years. Still, in these dark times you could receive an education if you walked from Freud's show of figure paintings over to Currin's folly a few blocks south. Freud's manner of modeling the figure with an encrusted pileup of paint may finally be judged a misunderstanding of modernism; his celebration of the painted surface, while probably meant to clarify representational structures in ways we know from the work of Soutine and Braque, amounts to little more than a series of angsty decorative flourishes. But Currin understands so little about pictorial conventions, whether Old Master or high modern, that you cannot even begin to speak about his work in terms of a misunderstanding of modernism.

As always, a gallerygoer who visits only the blue-chip dealers is going to miss a lot of the best work. This fall, Thornton Willis, a veteran painter, showed some wonderfully persuasive abstractions at Elizabeth Harris, comminglings of triangular forms, neither exactly crystalline nor exactly opaque, that suggest an emotional terrain at once rambunctious and saturnine. And a very young artist, Bryan Mesenbourg, presented some cunning constructions, reminiscent of H. C. Westermann in their pokerfaced love affair with old-fashioned gadgeteering, in a group show at Feigen Contemporary. In the midst of this white-hot art scene, however, anything that was capable of holding my attention, whether by Price or Kelly or Willis or Mesenbourg, seemed to exist not even at the margins of the art world, but in something more like solitary confinement, with each artist utterly alone, a lunatic in the padded cell of his own imagination. It is hardly surprising that even the people who still have the capacity to respond to a work of art have been finding it so difficult to get in the mood. The only common language left any longer is the language of reputations and trends—which is to say, the language of money.

In the midst of this supremely sordid season, I visited Art Basel Miami Beach, the fair that now anchors nearly a week of events in early December that extend well beyond the Convention Center on Miami Beach. And what struck me most forcibly as I wandered the aisles was the noisiness and the vehemence with which prices were announced. Dealers wanted to tell anybody and everybody, whether they were potential clients or just art-world rubberneckers, not only what everything in their booth cost, but how much the discount would be. It was an orgy of money talk. When you take a look at the art market, what you're really seeing is the stock market. The whole art world is like Nobu during bonus week, a freak show of conspicuous consumption. The point is not what the booze or the raw fish tastes like; the point is how fiendishly expensive it is.

III.

TO POINT OUT THAT CULTURE is a business, and sometimes even a moderately big business, is to state the obvious, and I will not argue with those who would say that so it always was and so it always will be. This is true, as far as it goes. The trouble is that a business model has come to drive the entire art world, and like the corporate executive who regards the launch of each new product as a challenge to the success of the last one, because you must keep growing or you will die, the arts community finds itself in a state of permanent anxiety. There always has to be a new artist whom the media will embrace as enthusiastically as they embraced Warhol; there always has to be a show that will top the excitement generated by the last blockbuster at the Modern or the Met. And a lot of the artists and curators are really into the game—they are fueling the system. What you see when you look at a painting by John Currin or Lisa Yuskavage is a business model. From this point of view, the current season is a big success. And this brings all the more forcibly to mind the essential paradox of cultural success, which is that growth becomes the measure of all things. In a world where everybody wants to quantify the value of experiences that are inherently ineffable, who can wonder that the guy who recently paid something like $140 million for a Pollock feels that he has cornered the market on ineffability?

Many people have observed that collectors now prefer to buy in the attention-grabbing public arena of the auction or the art fair, rather than in the relative privacy of an art gallery. One hears various explanations for this shift. Some say that collectors are worried about being outsmarted by the secret machinations of dealers. Others say that it is simply that the collectors want to have as many people as possible watching them as they spend their money. But there may be something deeper at work here, some fear of the inwardness or the particularity of the experiences that art can offer. By buying art in public, the collector turns a rarefied experience—and what one would hope is the private avidity for art—into a popular experience, a spectacle that unfolds as if under klieg lights in a sold-out stadium.

When the collecting of art takes on that familiar pop-culture buzz, we are seeing a diminishment of the variety of artistic experience, and this variety is among the glories of any culture. Baudelaire may have been the first to point out that one of the great pleasures and privileges open to an educated audience in a modern society is the possibility of experiencing both high art and popular culture. And why on earth shouldn't it be possible to enjoy *The Sopranos* and *Sex and the City*, which we take in with thousands of other people, and also the new work of an abstract painter that may be known to no more than a hundred? The trouble starts when people begin to imagine that all these experiences are equal. The argument for equalization is often presented as if it were a plea for populism, for a "democracy of access." But in practice this equalization is often profoundly anti-democratic, because the assumption is that the man on the street will never be capable of appreciating a Mondrian—or a Poussin—for what it is, on its own terms.

The biggest danger currently faced by people who love painting and sculpture is this unitary view of culture, which in practice amounts to the view that all culture is, or should be, popular culture. I am somewhat baffled by the appeal of such an idea, although perhaps it has something to do with the value that is currently placed on "interconnectivity" and "interface." Of course the organizers of Art Basel Miami Beach are anxious to distinguish what they do from what goes on at the multiplex, but the distinctions that they want to make are less of kind than of caliber. What they really want to do is create haute pop experiences.

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The mood in the Convention Center where Art Basel Miami Beach was held was not all that different from the atmosphere at a car show—or, for that matter, at an upscale mall. Fifty years ago, de Kooning's friend Edwin Denby was already arguing that "the miles of New York galleries [are] as luxurious to wander through as a slave market." And some of the critics who went down to report on Art Basel Miami Beach were perfectly aware that they were in the midst of the biggest and most luxurious slave market on earth. You could hear it in their been-there-done-that tone. And you could see critic after critic attempting, without much success, to rise above the muck by announcing that he or she had made one or two discoveries, something of real value hidden away at one of the satellite art shows, at Pulse or NADA or Scope, which had sprouted in some of the low-income and industrial areas on the mainland. In Miami, the search for integrity was desperate, and ultimately doomed.

COURTESY ROBERT SULLIVAN/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

MARY ELLEN SCHERL, *"Standing Lady"* at Art Basel Miami Beach

Monty Python would have had a field day with those art tours in Wynwood. The invasion of the trendoids was closely watched by the locals, many of whom were obviously living close to the poverty line. But even people who have never heard of Marcel Duchamp can see that when the people with the funny glasses show up to stare at the cubicles full of funny things, the real estate investors with their condo conversions can't be far behind. This is not to say that there wasn't some first-rate art to be seen at Art Basel Miami Beach, including significant works by Picasso, Morandi, and de Kooning. I did find myself thinking that for somebody, perhaps for some college kids who found their way here, Art Basel Miami Beach could be an open sesame. But once those kids fixed their attention on that Morandi, who was going to show them the way forward?

The trouble is that fewer and fewer people are willing to recognize the fundamentally different nature of various forms of cultural experience. And make no mistake, there are essential distinctions that must be made. It is in the very nature of popular culture that its pleasures are ones that we share with a wide range of people simultaneously. And it is in the very nature of high art that its pleasures are ones that we experience as individuals. To insist upon this distinction is not to say that one experience is better and one is worse, it is only to clarify the character of each experience. The art in popular culture has everything to do with creating a work that catalyzes a strain of feeling in the mass audience. High art operates in a completely different way, for each viewer comes to the work with the fullest, the most intense, the most personal awareness of the conventions and traditions of an art form. The essential high-art encounter is a private encounter—but we are living in the YouTube era, when people are often uncomfortable with privacy, with its challenges and its revelations. The intensity of the high-art experience has everything to do with a disengagement from the pressures of the present. It is the unquantifiable experience par excellence.

The essential problem in the art world today is that in almost every area, from the buying and selling of contemporary art to the programs of our greatest museums, there is an obsession with appealing to the largest imaginable audience. And in practice this means always operating as if painting and sculpture were a dimension of popular culture. To be sure, I am drawing a sharper distinction than is always the case. Pop culture has sometimes gained in interest when it has adapted some of the fascination with difficulty and obscurity that is a powerful element in the high-art traditions. By the same token, the saltiness of pop can add something to a painting or a sculpture; and at the Museum of Modern Art in the years when Alfred H. Barr Jr. ran the show, some of the marketing ideas of Madison Avenue were used to jumpstart people's engagement with difficult modern art. The problem, again, is not with popular culture, but with the wholesale imposition of its methods and values on an alien terrain. It is this muddling of the realms that fuels the insane art commerce of our day. When we see artists whose careers are barely a decade old dominating the auction rooms, with their work selling for millions of dollars, we are being told that a widespread consensus can crystallize in a moment—and this is a pop culture idea. So, for that matter, is the idea that the way for a museum to attract an audience is by creating a sexy new addition where people can see and be seen. One of the tragedies of the past few decades has been that the museums have lost faith in their own permanent collections, where visitors were once invited to engage, one by one, with works created by the masters, one by one.

IV.

I AM AS TIRED AS THE NEXT PERSON of the high culture versus popular culture debates that obsessed intellectuals for much of a century. There was a deep vein of self-congratulation that ran through those discussions, in which the literati showed off their in-depth knowledge of the

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other side of the tracks. Yet there was also a terrific energy about the best of those discussions, a spirit that was fundamentally dialectical and fluid, an effort not to subjugate one side of the argument to the other but to strengthen our understanding of all aspects of the culture through a constant process of comparative investigation.

Laissez-faire aesthetics is fundamentally anti-dialectical, not only because there is no acknowledgment of the need to comprehend the divergent implications of our attraction to high art and popular culture, but also, strangely enough, because there is a refusal to accept the very existence of competing forces. There is no struggle with distinctions because there is no recognition of distinctions. The result is a flattening of all artistic experience. If the clearest expression of laissez-faire aesthetics is to be found in the extent to which fashionable painters are now embraced as simultaneously offering traditional values and Disneyland-style fun, the new mood is also having an impact in the art museums, where pop culture is often sold as the new laissez-faire avant-garde. I still listen to Bob Dylan. I am still caught up in those prickly yet silky lyrics that I first heard in the '60s, when I bought the albums as soon as they appeared. But I question why the Morgan Library and Museum felt the need to present a show this season devoted to the life and times of Dylan, and I was frankly appalled to see "Bob Dylan's American Journey: 1956–1966" competing for attention with a small gathering of medieval illuminated manuscripts and metalwork, a group of drawings by Fragonard and other artists of the eighteenth century, a retrospective of the career of Saul Steinberg, and a show of Mozart manuscripts.

I realize that even to raise the question—what is Dylan doing at the Morgan?—is to provoke the wrath of the intellectual hipsters. They will point out that the Morgan was the invention of a modern millionaire, and that the pages illuminated by a monk in the fourteenth century were no more destined to be exhibited or collected on Madison Avenue than some album covers produced by Columbia Records in the 1960s. And of course a library that is dedicated to our cultural heritage can arguably embrace a fluid concept of its own collections and exhibition programs. The hipsters will want to make it seem close-minded to question why Dylan memorabilia should be exhibited steps away from the Stavelot Triptych, a masterpiece of the medieval goldsmith's art.

But the question can be put a different way. It seems to me that it is in fact the Morgan that is being close-minded—insensitive to distinctions, to particularities, to the possibility that high culture and popular culture are so wonderfully different that they cannot in fact be put together. I imagine that Steinberg, an artist whose understanding of the relationship between art high and low was as deftly dialectical as that of anybody who has ever lived, could have woven a funny little allegory around the presence of the Bleecker Street hipster troubadour amid the incunabula at the Morgan, but if the people at the museum see any irony in the situation, they are not letting on.

I worry about the Morgan. Renzo Piano's ballyhooed addition, which opened last spring, has transformed what was a series of intimate spaces dedicated to the glories of connoisseurship and scholarship into a bunch of art boutiques in a high-modern mini-mall. This is not to say that the Morgan cannot still offer an unforgettable museum-going experience. Yet the signs are not good. American museums are full of curators who worry about the malling of the museum, and realize that there are other ways to answer the concerns of trustees who want to bolster the endowment and combat rising costs. But in a country as wealthy as ours, what are generally presented as fiscal decisions can also be a cover for deeper philosophical predispositions. There may not be a museum director in America who is any longer willing to look a trustee in the eye and tell him that he is sitting in a museum and it is no place to talk about pop culture marketing strategies. There may not be a museum director in America who is willing to argue that an art museum is a particular kind of place, and that particular places are friendly to particular experiences.

We live in a country in which we have lots of opportunities to enjoy Dylan, and motorcycles, and the sight of Dylan on a motorcycle, and I don't see that it is asking too much to insist that there is a place where the focus is on medieval manuscripts and Old Master drawings and Mozart and the nineteenth-century novel. Make no mistake, there is an agenda behind the Dylan show at the Morgan. "Bob Dylan's American Journey" is an effort to reassure the public that an institution that might be perceived as off-putting because it stands for some particular things is in fact a laissez-faire institution—a place that will happily embrace whatever the market will bear.

WHAT LAISSEZ-FAIRE AESthetics has left us with—all along the line, in the curatorial meetings at museums, in the conversations in the aisles at the art fairs, in the MFA seminars in the art schools—is a weakening of all conviction, an unwillingness to take stands, a reluctance to champion, or surrender to, any first principle. Perhaps it was in response to such whatever-ism that many people of taste found themselves waxing enthusiastic over the intractably maudlin paintings devoted to the atrocities at Abu Ghraib that Fernando Botero exhibited at the Marlborough Gallery in the fall. The enthusiasm that sophisticated gallerygoers showed for these works, which had about as much sense of form and structure as mushy brown gravy poured over marzipan, had a lot to do with the fact that an artist had taken a stand. (It happened to be the right stand.) And the fact that Botero was not selling the paintings one by one, but wanted to donate them all to a museum, could make him seem heroic in the current climate. By the time that Arthur Danto proclaimed in *The Nation* that Botero's paintings were in certain respects superior to Picasso's *Guernica*, we might as well have been back in the 1930s, in the low era of socially relevant art, when images of oppressed workers and handsome soldiers fighting fascism were embraced by an audience that already knew enough of modern art to know that it was not really comfortable with it.

Botero appeals to an old-style philistinism, to the idea that works of art should have meanings so obvious that they grab you by the lapels. If people are running to embrace his Abu Ghraib paintings, perhaps it is because they feel so deeply threatened by the new face of philistinism, which is laissez-faire aesthetics. Perhaps any stand in art now seems better than no stand at all, and never mind the art. For what laissez-faire aesthetics promises is a tolerance of everything—high, pop, whatever: a tolerance so bland that it really amounts to indifference. (This is not repressive tolerance so much as manic-depressive tolerance.) And by now gallerygoers and

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museumgoers, even the most astute among them, are quite frankly afraid to insist that high culture always has some element of the prejudicial about it—a preference for a particular style or way of doing things or play of the imagination that is to some degree not supported by mere fact.

Laissez-faire aesthetics is the aesthetics that violates the very principle of art, because it insists that anything goes, when in fact the only thing that is truly unacceptable in the visual arts is the idea that anything goes. At times, amid the chic hedge-fund maelstrom of Art Basel Miami Beach, it could seem that what had died was the modernist century, with its vehement advocacy of certain aesthetic principles. Perhaps we have to accept that it has gone. But what is really in danger now is something much bigger than modernity. It is nothing less than the precious exclusivity of the high-art experience, which stretches from the Tanagra figurines and the Romanesque manuscripts to the paintings of Rembrandt and Poussin and Corot and Mondrian. There is nothing laissez-faire about any of these masterpieces. When we contemplate them in all their particularity—in the almost delusional extremism of their varied visions and in the insistent singularity of their poetry—we are constantly reminded that high culture is anything but easygoing, that it is always daringly, rightfully, triumphantly intolerant. ■

Oren Harman

Sermons in Stone

THE SEASHELL ON THE MOUNTAINTOP: A STORY OF SCIENCE, SAINTHOOD, AND THE HUMBLE GENIUS WHO DISCOVERED A NEW HISTORY OF THE EARTH
By Alan Cutler
(Dutton, 228 pp., $23.95)

THE MAN WHO FOUND TIME: JAMES HUTTON AND THE DISCOVERY OF THE EARTH'S ANTIQUITY
By Jack Repcheck
(Perseus, 247 pp., $26)

I.

"VAST ... HORRID, HIDEOUS, ghastly ruins." These are not the words of an observer of a latter-day war zone or a witness to the effects of an ecological disaster on a city of yore. Rather, it was the typical reaction of the seventeenth-century tourist when chancing upon ... the Alps! If this seems surprising, then consider also the pronouncement of Thomas Jefferson that there exists a riddle "beyond the investigation of human sagacity." Had Jefferson been referring to the conundrum of human consciousness, or the problem of free will, or perhaps the confounding paradox of a benevolent, all-powerful God who allows evil in this world, we would be remiss in expressing our confusion. But the elusive puzzle too great for the powers of the human mind was the mystery of seashells embedded in stones atop mountains nowhere near the sea—what Jefferson called "the origin of shells in high places." And what about the equally astounding admission by Isaac Newton that the universal laws of mechanics that he had painstakingly described were doubtless suspended in the beginning of time to accommodate God's twenty-four-hour, six-day adventure of the creation of the world? That the world was born on October 23, 4004 B.C.E., was an obvious certainty to the Archbishop of Armagh, James Ussher, in his *Annales Veteris Testamenti*, in 1650.

It is all exceedingly strange to us. But two wonderful popular renditions of the history of geology, by Alan Cutler and by Jack Repcheck, take us back in time, geological and historical, to a world very different from the one we live in today. The story that holds the key to unlocking such curiosities of human understanding, it turns out, is a story conceived layer upon layer, in which the appearances of stones and ridges and fossils, the rise and fall of cities and empires and professions, the vicissitudes of mundane and celestial politics, and the evolution of human knowledge all function in the same manner: as palimpsest maps of time.

Yeats yearned for the "Land of Heart's Desire,/Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,/But joy is wisdom, time an endless song," and probably men and women of all ages have shared his desire. But the notion that time functions for humans as it does for the earth is actually a modern concept, and it owes much to the two men whose stories are told so vividly in these two little-big books. That humankind has a history was clear to Aristotle and to Aquinas and to Luther, but that the Earth had a history was another matter altogether. Wrinkles on the face of an old man are a testament to long years of love and disappointment and anger and hope, but could the same thing be said of "wrinkles" on the face of the Earth? If God created a perfect Earth, could the present state of the natural world really be a key to its past?

II.

NICOLAUS STENO WAS BORN Niels Stenson in Copenhagen in the winter of 1638, a decade before the Peace of Westphalia would finally bring some quiet to a Europe ravaged by war. Contemporary observers of the debates between creationists and evolutionists, or between advocates of stem-cell research and their foes, might be surprised to learn that science and religion were not always at loggerheads, but rather nestled very comfortably in centuries past into a cohesive and reassuring worldview sanctioned by scripture, belief, and observation. Centuries before the word "scientist" was coined (this happened in 1840), alchemists, experimental philosophers, natural historians, and natural philosophers plumbed the depths of the observable world, searching out the patterns and forces that would have been put in place by a benevolent God. The heroes of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century were almost all devout Christians; the chance to demonstrate the regularity of the universe as conceived by a merciful deity was a tempting prospect for a clever young lad growing up at the time, and the dutiful Steno kindled to the challenge.

Oren Harman is the author of THE MAN WHO INVENTED THE CHROMOSOME: A LIFE OF CYRIL DARLINGTON *(Harvard University Press).*

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Just a short decade after having enrolled at the University of Copenhagen to study medicine, Steno was lauded in the great capitals of Europe as one of the finest anatomists of his age. "Neither a butterfly nor a fly escapes his skill," an admirer wrote, having watched Steno dissect the eye of a horse at the Sorbonne's prestigious École de Médecine. "He would count the bones of a flea—if fleas have bones." It is to Steno that we owe the discovery of the duct that supplies saliva to the mouth, and also of the tear-producing glands. It was Steno who challenged the prevalent notion that muscles act by the ballooning of their entire mass, rather than from the contraction of their fibers. (This idea was rejected at the time, re-discovered by physiologists a century later, and re-affirmed at the molecular level in the 1980s.) Steno was also the man who discovered that females of live-bearing species produce eggs, just like egg-producing species: anatomists had previously assumed that mammalian female eggs were simply degenerate testes.

Steno died in 1686, at the age of forty-eight. The above achievements would have been incredible for any scientific career, but they turn fantastical when we learn that Steno was ordained as a minister in 1675 at the age of thirty-seven (and actually stopped working in science two years earlier) and that he is remembered today not for being a great anatomist, but rather as the father, or the proto-father, of the science that would one day call itself geology.

He never finished his medical studies in Copenhagen; he traveled to Amsterdam and then to Leiden to do so. It was a doctor's duty at the time to know something about stones. Cutler relates how crystals of topaz pressed against a wound were believed to stop bleeding, or iron-ore hematite to ward off diseases of the blood. And so it is not all that surprising that following a three-month stay in religiously pluralist Amsterdam, where he met and befriended Spinoza, Steno wrote his first scholarly paper on the subject of hot springs.

TRAVELING THROUGH THE GREAT seats of learning of his day, Steno began to feel uneasy about the natural and mechanical philosophies taught at the universities. Heirs of the Middle Ages, these hallowed halls of learning were erected to preserve knowledge, not to create it. Centuries of tradition handed down from the ancients could hardly be fallible; but what the eye could see might well be an illusion, prey to tricks of the mind and follies of the heart. As an anatomist, this became clear to Steno early on. He recognized that, as Cutler writes, "dissection was the art of opening up flesh to reveal what Galen said was supposed to be there. If what was found did not match the text, it was an embarrassment to the dissector, not to Galen."

The greatest blow to Steno's scientific idealism came care of the pineal gland of a human cadaver. Mechanism and skepticism were two virtues of the Cartesian mechanical philosophy close to Steno's exacting scientific heart, but Descartes had constructed his philosophy of man on the premise that humans differed from all other living things because they had souls, and could therefore not be treated as mere devices whose motions and behavior could be accounted for by his mechanical philosophy. In *On Man*, Descartes appointed the tiny nut-shaped pineal gland, nestled peacefully in the center of the brain, to be the seat of the human soul. The gyrations of this gland, he wrote, could account within his physics for the effects of the immaterial soul on the material body.

The only problem, as Steno's sharp eye grasped, was that the anatomy of the pineal gland did not accommodate any such gyrations. The tiny nut was fixed and immobile, like a large granite outcrop in the ground. The mechanical philosophy of Descartes was the pinnacle of scientific achievement of the day, yet Steno, hunched over some corpse, grasped that the followers of Descartes were just as dogmatic as those of Galen had been. They saw what they wanted to see. Perhaps what was practiced by men of science was not scientific enough, from the anatomy theater to the alchemical laboratory to the natural expanse of the heavens. Disillusioned by what he took to be the facile standards of the science of his day, Steno turned from uncovering layer upon layer of human and animal flesh to probe a different kind of gradation—that of the endless and mysterious strata of the layered Earth itself. Traveling to Florence in 1665 to join the disciples of Galileo at Ferdinando d'Medici's famous Accademia del Cimento, he passed through the Alps and the Apennines on his way to becoming "an anatomist of the world."

III.

SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT IN HUMAN history, like strata in geological time, come layered one atop the other. When Aristotle grappled with the problem of "the origin of shells in high places," he harked back to a pre-Socratic tradition that imagined an ancient ocean covering the entire world. The waxing and waning of such a mammoth sea was part of the "vital process" of a world with no beginning and no end. Seashells in mountains were simply deposited there over unfathomable tracks of immeasurable time. But Christian men of science at the gates of the seventeenth century could not allow such a pagan view. Only God was eternal to the Christian mechanist; time had direction, a beginning and an end. All of scripture would be nonsense if the world itself was, as Aristotle said it was, eternal.

But then how to explain such unnatural natural phenomena as seashells found on mountains? The biblical flood was one option, yet the shells looked like those of saltwater species, and the flood was a consequence of fresh rain falling from God's sky. Besides, how could so many seashells be spread so widely in such a short time, when the biblical flood, after all, was said to have lasted no more than a year? More difficult still was the problem of chronology. If the solid earth and all its rocks were formed during the six days of God's creation, how then could seashells find themselves embedded *within* rocks, if the deluge occurred long after these had already been formed? Luther's *sola fide sola scriptura* provided the impetus for a new kind of religious natural thinker not prone to solving such mysteries through metaphor and exegesis, but rather through a tough-minded look at

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what was there. But the puzzle was difficult. Aristotle's waxing and waning may have been true if time were eternal, but it made little sense in a six-thousand-year-old world. What were these organic shapes within rocks, and how, on God's earth, had they got there?

Neoplatonists and Hermetic philosophers found little in these questions to shake their understandings. Since the character and the nature of living things were not determined by their biological properties, but were emanations of ideas from the celestial realm of eternal forms, it stood to reason that some of the seashells should get caught in their downward motion on the mountaintops, which were, after all, the closest physical entities to the heavens. But for an increasing numbers of observers and thinkers such a theory would no longer suffice. "The delight the Renaissance mind took in all forms of paradox and illusion," Cutler writes, "was slowly being replaced by a more sober rationalism. Mysticism was out, mechanics were in." The great English experimentalist Robert Boyle now wrote that "the works of God are not like the Tricks of Juglers or the Pagents that entertain Princes." The works of God were lawful, and it was the task of the man of science to find and describe them.

FIGURING OUT THE PROBLEM OF shells in rocks meant figuring out the ultimate nature of matter itself, and about this, too, layers of human judgment had deposited over the ages. For the ancient Greek philosopher Thales, all matter was at base water, and the solid earth merely a hardened crust formed over a primeval ocean, and earthquakes the result of the shifting of this crust on the waters below. Empedocles some years later added air, fire, and earth to the basic elemental fray, but it was the Roman Lucretius who finally came up with the essential and reductive theory of all. In *On the Nature of Things*, Lucretius described the natural philosophy that would see itself revived once again in the gilded age of the Renaissance, when the books of the ancients were re-printed and re-read by a growing intellectual middle class.

Atomism was the notion that all observable events and forms were the result of random collisions between unseen elemental particles, called atoms, from the Greek for "indivisible." But as Cutler skillfully relates, atomism presented a grave problem for the Catholic Church in the form of the Eucharist: if atoms were immutable, how could sacred transformations of matter ever really occur? Lacking a solution to this difficulty, early modern natural philosophers refashioned Lucretius's atomism into the "corpuscular" theory of matter, retaining the rudiments of the theory but dropping the theological and metaphysical difficulties by abandoning the speculation on whether such atoms or corpuscles were divisible or indivisible. Matter was an affair of pure geometry, and as Kepler (and Plato before him) knew, God was a geometer.

Pantheists, such as Steno's friend Spinoza, thought that minerals and rocks could grow just like plants and animals. The great seventeenth-century Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher, one of the most famous men in the world of his time, spoke of *lapides sui generis*, or self-generated stones, that grew and gave birth, and even came in varieties female and male. This is how Kircher, the church's scientific retort to Galileo, explained the otherwise anomalous appearance of shells (mollusks were created on the fifth day) in rocks (created on the third day): a "plastic spirit" emanating from God constantly permeates the world, spontaneously generating all kinds of wonders, such as flies in putrid meat and shells and fossils in already created crusts of earth and stone. Voltaire later preferred this explanation to the otherwise laughable alternatives that he himself concocted, that shells in high places were either the remains of snacks discarded by alpine travelers or ornamental badges lost by wandering pilgrims.

But a pious Lutheran such as Steno could hardly accept that things had their own life, even if it was imbued by God. After all, the creative powers of nature might ultimately lead to belief in a nature that is self-creating, leaving God aside. So a new breed of seventeenth-century thinkers, mostly Protestant and devout, rejected animism and embraced corpuscles and mechanical philosophy instead, giving a soul to man and a spirit to God and the angels, and judging all else to be nothing but inert, dumb matter. These mechanists offered physical explanations for the formation of the solar system and the movements of the

UNHAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Fifty Years Since Roth v. United States

The National Tragedy of the Supreme Court's Misjudgment on Obscenity

by Daniel Mark Cohen

"We may look to Armies for our Defense, but Virtue is our best security."
-Samuel Adams

From the commencement of sporting events, to the conclusion of presidential addresses, in times of celebration and in times of peril, Americans, religious and secular alike, by reflex and by ritual, have grown accustomed to reciting the most concise of petitionary prayers: "God bless America." However, considering the wanton patronage of pornography by so many millions of Americans, and the underlying, abasing purpose of that enterprise, considering the vehement even aggressive opposition of Americans to regulation of pornography's distribution via the Internet, and most of all, considering the consequent gratuitous and indelible sexual corruption of the souls of the country's children, practices enshrined in law and unassailably sanctioned by the United States Supreme Court, the question that remains to be answered is how Americans can believe they are, in the collective sense, entitled to God's blessing? In other words, petitioning God to bless America rests upon the underlying, unspoken premise that America comprehensively deserves such blessing. But why should God bless America when, as a nation, she insists, and often aggressively so, on the free, unregulated distribution of the most vile sexual images so that they daily reach the otherwise innocent eyes and chaste minds of countless *millions* of children, thus arresting their emotional development, prematurely agitating their souls, and in so doing, diminishing their posterity, and so, the greater posterity of the nation?

God bless America?

Under the circumstances, why should God bless America?

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planets. And so it was inevitable that scholars would begin to wonder if there might be laws that could explain the movements and histories on Earth itself, of mountains and oceans and ridges, and, ultimately, of living beings. Was it possible that unearthed fossils were remnants of species that no longer walked the Earth? Was not extinction overruled in a world of special creation by God? Why were there signs of volcanic activity in places with no human record of such catastrophe? Could there have been physical forces at work, changing the face of the planet, that no longer pertained today? Why, people wondered, was there obvious evidence of stratification in the ground if there was no history to the Earth? What, in God's name, would be the point? Nicolaus Steno wanted to find answers, and he went to Medician Florence to crack the mysteries of the Earth while holding on to the mystery of God.

IV.

THAT TREES AND SEASHELLS added layers as they grew was known well before Steno's time. That the earth itself was made of layers was apparent to the ancients as well. What Steno accomplished was not, strictly speaking, a feat of observation; he did not see with his eyes formations that others had failed to notice, something that James Hutton would do a century later. Steno's leap was to understand that the layering in the earth represented a sequence in which time had a direction. The sequence, in other words, was a chronology—a map of how the earth had changed over time. This may seem trivial to us today, but it was absolute anathema to a seventeenth-century sensibility.

The key to turning the tide was Steno's insistence that science ask only questions that could be answered—in his case "Which came first?" rather than "How long ago?" "If a solid body is enclosed on all sides by another solid body," Steno wrote in his seventy-eight-page masterpiece *De Solido*, in 1668, "the first of the two to harden was that one which, when both touch, transferred its own characteristics to the surface of the other."

It sounds simple, but it was this piece of logic that helped for the first time to distinguish between a quartz pebble embedded in a sedimentary deposit and a quartz vein following a fracture in the same deposit, or between an oyster nestled in a nook of a sandstone boulder and a cockleshell found in that same sandstone, having impressed its signature ribs on the surrounding stone. This novel notion of chronology—the idea that from the present world vanished worlds can be awakened—now spawned three simple and basic principles. First, the "principle of superposition"—when a geological layer was forming, those layers observed above it today were not in existence; layers are laid in sequence. Second, the "principle of original horizontality"—a layer's current orientation notwithstanding, it was once horizontal, since water is the source of all sedimentation, and water always arranges itself parallel to the horizon, no matter what cavity it fills. Steno knew that since the earth is not static but dynamic, strata often become vertical, or even completely overturned. How, then, could one know the proper sequence? By assuming, Steno answered, that when sediments are formed from water, the larger, weightier particles settle first, the flightier, smaller grains slowly settling on top. Sediments, by their internal structure, could serve as maps of their own creation. And so, third, there emerged the "principle of lateral continuity," which showed that just as tilted strata implied the movements of a dynamic earth, so too did "bared edges" of strata—sudden breaks in an otherwise continuous layer—imply that what is now a mountain had once been a valley. The Earth had a history that could be painstakingly deciphered by observing the forms apparent today.

These three principles are now referred to as "Steno's Principles" and are recited in their sleep by all first-year geology students. Their importance as, so to speak, the bedrocks of geological science derives from the scientific principle that Steno followed when deducing them centuries ago: science is the art of answering the answerable, not of imagining the imaginable. (Similarly, Newton comprehended this when he perceived that he could not discover the nature of gravity, but could instead devise a mathematics that unified the motion of the carriage with the revolutions of the moon.) Steno resolved to tackle what could be reasonably approached, setting in place the principles that would define for posterity the science of the earth.

Steno was a religious man. When Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* was published, attacking organized religion, Steno wrote him a letter to express his discontent: "You do not think there exists any certainty besides demonstrative certainty, and are ignorant of the certainty of faith which is above all demonstration." And then the man who championed asking questions that could be answered forsook scientific inquiry to be ordained as a minister of the church. "Beautiful is what we see," Cutler quotes his hero. "More beautiful is what we understand. Most beautiful is what we do not comprehend." Steno, as he told his scientific adversary and friend Kircher, was giving up science as a sacrifice to God. Becoming the titular bishop of Titiopolis, an ancient see somewhere in Asia Minor that had long been lost to the Turks and the exact location of which was not quite known (what was referred to by the church as *in partibus infidelium*—in the land of the infidels), Steno died in 1686, free of any worldly possessions and professing the "agreement between Nature and Scripture." For Steno, the world was about 5,600 years old, so perhaps it is fitting that in 1988, 202 years after his death, he was beatified by Pope John Paul II on October 23—the very date Bishop James Ussher had carefully calculated for the creation of the world.

V.

I ONCE SPENT A CAREFREE SUMMER as a stagehand in one of the many theaters of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The particular theater I helped to construct was built inside an old gray-stone church called Greyfriars Kirk, its façade charred, like many an Edinburgh building, with the black soot of the industrial revolution. Little did I know at the time that beneath the earth in the kirk's backyard cemetery lay one of the great figures in the history of geology. Such is the nature of scientific and historical knowledge: like sediments and strata, it accumulates one layer at a time.

James Hutton was born in 1726, just forty years after Steno's death. But the world into which Hutton was born was as different from Steno's as limestone is from granite. Of Steno's day, Cutler writes, "The Renaissance had pretty much run its course. The convulsions of the Protestant reformation had mostly subsided. The Age of Enlightenment, on

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the other hand, was barely on the horizon. It was an awkward, in-between age—reborn, reformed, but not yet enlightened." That might help to explain the apparent paradox of a man who showed that the Earth has a history, but who nevertheless insisted that it was only as old as the Bible said it was. Hutton, by contrast, was born into an Edinburgh very much at the heart of the new-old world. In the short span of Hutton's generation, the Scottish Enlightenment would produce Hume's philosophy and Smith's economics and Ferguson's sociology and Robertson's historiography and Watt's steam engine.

Scotland had been ruled for centuries by Jacobites, Catholic Highlander clansmen, the Scottish equivalent of feudal landlords—the followers of James II, the Catholic monarch deposed in 1688. It was these very clansmen who on a dark night in July 1745 tiptoed down to a Western Highland beach to meet James II's grandson, Charles Stuart or Bonnie Prince Charlie, as he disembarked from a small frigate carrying himself and only seven followers in a bid to recapture the lost Stuart throne. By mid-September, Prince Charles marched into Edinburgh unopposed, and decided to push southward, leading his clansman army all the way to Derby, just 130 miles north of London. But when rumors of an English force of thirty thousand made their way to the Catholic camp, the clan chiefs forced their ambitious prince to capitulate.

As Jack Repcheck beautifully relates, the march back to Scotland was the beginning of the end for Stuart claims to the English monarchy, as well as the beginning of the end for Old Scotland. Quickly, Westminster dispatched the duke of Cumberland northward to destroy the fleeing clansmen, and the "harrying of the glens" became the name for the terrible pacification that ensued. English laws now stripped the clan chiefs of all authority; clan councils, the wearing of tartans, the playing of pipes, even the speaking of Gaelic—all were outlawed. Highland culture became a thing of the past.

Edinburgh, on the other hand, was now free to accept back its Whig Presbyterians, a progressive merchant, jurist, and intellectual class largely descended from Lowland families in the territories south of Edinburgh and Glasgow that had been settled over the centuries by invading Normans, and then English, and with a strong interest in economic and academic ties with London. The Moderate Party of Presbyterian Whigs, William Robertson proclaimed, saw "industry, knowledge, and humanity linked together by an indissoluble chain." No surprise, then, that "Auld Reekie," as Edinburgh was called—referring to the stench of chimneys and pollution, and an unusual system of waste removal (out the window)—was increasingly described as the Athens of the North.

THE YOUNG JAMES HUTTON enrolled to study at the University of Edinburgh in this atmosphere at the tender age of fourteen, unaware, most assuredly, that if, as Repcheck writes, "Copernicus took man away from the divine center of things," he would one day take man away from "the divine beginning of things." Hutton ended up studying medicine in the Paris of Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau, and finishing up in Lei-

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den in 1749. Edinburgh would one day become a center of medical studies, but the continental capitals of learning still offered a lad with sincere pretensions the best training available. Cities and professions, like fossils, arrange themselves in historical layers; like dinosaurs, once-great seats of learning are forgotten; like small mammalian shrews, once-great seats of ignorance all of a sudden become exalted.

Hutton ended up forsaking his white robe for the gloves and boots of a farmer on a piece of inherited land, returning to Scotland after making a small fortune from a company that made sal ammoniac (used as flux in metalworking) from common coal soot. The next thirteen years were spent at his farm, Slighouses, learning and applying new methods of agriculture, and nursing an increasing curiosity in what was now called geology. Repcheck tells us that Hutton read the nine treatises on the Earth that encompassed all known geological thought of his day, among them Steno's *De Solido*; Thomas Burnet's *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*, a treatise of biblical Newtonianism; and William Whiston's *New Theory of the Earth*, which invoked comet collisions to explain the biblical deluge. Most interesting, perhaps, for it broke with biblical chronology (then considered one of the exact sciences), was Benoit de Maillet's anonymously authored *Telliamed* in 1748. Benoit's thinly veiled treatise (the title is his surname spelled backward) was the first ever to propose that the world was ancient—about two billion years old. But *Telliamed* was not accorded much scientific respect, probably due to the fact that it was said to have been written by an Oriental philosopher following ancient Egyptian legend, who argued, among other things, that women and men originated from mermaids and mermen.

Buffon's thirty-four-volume *Histoire Naturelle*, which appeared in 1749, was a different story altogether; after all, Buffon was the intendant of the Jardin du Roi and a respected member of France's scientific elite. This did not stop the faculty of the Sorbonne from sending him a missive in the winter of 1751 informing him that fourteen ideas in his book had been found "reprehensible and contrary to the creed of the church." Repcheck tells us that the offending lines were these: "The waters of the sea have produced the mountains and valleys of the land—the water of the heaven, reducing all to a level, will at last deliver the whole land over to the sea, and the sea, successively prevailing over the land, will leave dry new continents like those which we inhabit." Buffon, in other words, had suggested that God had not created the mountains and the valleys directly, but rather through the agencies of the waters of the seas and of the skies. He was made to (perfunctorily) recant.

Issuance

And so I have become
this slow poem of mouths resisted—
paraphrasing my desire
from the stones of a river.

I might have held his body
for the thought alone that he
could not be owned,
or what it is to listen low—

but I rode my bones' panic
through the tail of fallen dusk.
I walked unlit into the hills of pine.

JUDITH BISHOP

"THINGS ARE MADE KNOWN only by comparison," wrote Hutton's biographer and close friend John Playfair, "and that which is unique admits of no description." Hutton was indeed a unique character, wearing clothes "often found in direct collision" with current fashion, and living unmarried with three spinster sisters until the very end of his life. He was particularly unique when it came to geology. Realizing that the erosion he witnessed daily on his own land carried grains of dirt into streams, which flowed into rivers, which flowed into seas, where the grains sedimented and eventually turned into rock, Hutton saw that there must be a mechanism for the restoration of soil, for otherwise the land would quickly become uninhabitable, a result that the believing Hutton could not reconcile with a benevolent God.

Intense heat and pressure at the core of the Earth would have to be the mechanism that accounted for the consolidation of sediments and their elevation from the seabed to replace the land that had eroded. The elevation could not be the result of receding waters of an ancient and vast ocean, as the German Abraham Gottlob Werner, the leading European geologist of the day, had claimed. For if this were so, all stratified rock would be horizontal, in the shape it had originally formed on the floor of lakes, seas, and oceans. But everyone knew that strata were often found in every degree of "fracture, flexure, and contortion." Forces from within, powerful but slow-working, would explain the formation and re-formation of land on Earth; shrinking and expanding waters just didn't seem up to the job.

If the cycle of the land described by Hutton in two invited talks to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1785 was true, as everyone now understood, there arose the question of time. "As there is not in human observation proper means for measuring the waste of land upon the globe," Hutton proclaimed, "it is hence inferred, that we cannot estimate the duration of what we see at present, nor calculate the period at which it had begun; so that, with respect to human observation, this world has neither a beginning nor an end." The earth was so unimaginably ancient that Hutton would not even hazard a guess as to its age.

But unlike Steno, Hutton would actually demonstrate to the world something it had not yet seen. At Glen Tilt, he had found in the bed of the river gorgeous red granite veins frozen like lightning in the sedimentary black rock into which they had once gushed from below. This was ample proof that granite was formed by subterranean heat and pressure, but it did not yet prove Hutton's theory of cycles. Then, on a sunny afternoon in the summer of 1788, from a small boat beneath a rock exposure on the weather-beaten cliffs of Siccar Point, Hutton finally found it: a formation of vertical and horizontal sedimentary rocks, which left no doubt that what had happened was the result of the process of erosion, sedimentation, heat and pressure, elevation, and then erosion again, just as he had described. Knowing the modest rate at which deposits settle, it was immediately clear that what was being observed was the result of millions and millions of years of geology. "The mind seemed to grow giddy by looking so far into the abyss of time," Playfair wrote. "We find no vestige of a beginning—no prospect of an end" was Hutton's own poetic reaction. He had

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discovered, Bible and deluge and Methuselah aside, the awesome concept of deep time.

HUTTON DIED IN 1797, AT THE age of seventy. The early 1800s saw the founding of the Geological Society of Great Britain, and with it the strengthening of a group of "catastrophists" who, like Werner with his ancient ocean, continued to perform impressive mental acrobatics to try to fit the story of the Earth into the story of the Bible. Catastrophists now argued that volcanic forces, which they could no longer ignore, had been vastly more powerful in the past, so that measurements of geological dynamics today could teach little of what had come before. "None of the agents that she now employs were sufficient for her ancient works," the Frenchman Georges Cuvier wrote about nature. Once again, discounting the notion that present observation could explain the past helped to preserve a relatively young earth, keeping James Ussher's chronology in the margins of the King James Bible, and of the hearts and minds of men.

Finally, in the 1820s, the Scotsman Charles Lyell, following a visit to Siccar Point, resurrected Hutton's geology, this time for good. Lyell's principle of uniformitarianism—the notion that present forces were exactly the same in the past—became the bedrock of his gradualist geology, a geology that now took Hutton's cycle and deep time as givens. Charles Darwin took Lyell's *Principles of Geology* to read on the *Beagle*, and much has been written about his translation of Lyell's gradualism in the rocks to the gradual transformations in nature. So the intellectual epic stretching back in time—from Lucretius and Aristotle through Steno, Descartes, Kircher, Spinoza, Hutton, Lyell, and Darwin; from Rome through Copenhagen through Amsterdam, Paris, Leiden, Florence, Edinburgh, and the Galápagos Islands; from paganism through Catholicism through Reformation through Enlightenment—eventually tells its tale in wondrous and serpentine ways.

Geology describes a linear record with many a cycle within; time has an arrow, but it also travels in circles. And in life, as in the rocks, what goes around comes around: one of Hutton's closest friends, with whom he made many of his geological excursions and discoveries, was George Clerk-Maxwell, the great-great-grandfather of James Clerk-Maxwell, whose nineteenth-century studies of magnetism would play a role in the 1960s in providing scientific evidence for continental drift. This was the clincher for the long disregarded and disbelieved theory of plate tectonics proposed by Alfred Wegener earlier in the century, which now stands as the unifying theory of geology. I am pretty certain that Steno would have been shocked to learn of deep time and evolution and tectonics, and I am equally confident that Hutton would have been glad to witness such developments from his pastoral resting place behind Greyfriars Kirk. But I'd give a dinosaur fossil in mint condition to know what Steno and Hutton, the two forgotten fathers of the science of the Earth and each embedded in a world of his own, would make of the modern poet's great lines: "Time present and time past/Are both perhaps present in time future/And time future contained in time past." ■

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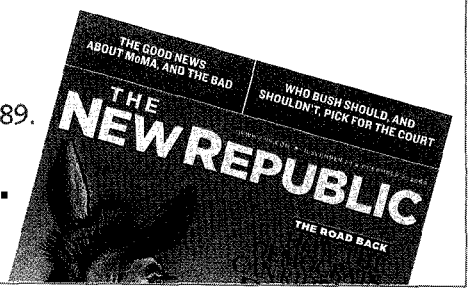

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BAGHDAD DIARIST

War Bonds

In Baghdad, a busted infrastructure has left entire neighborhoods navigable by vehicle only. The sector we soldiers patrol is known unaffectionately as "Little Venice" because of the dark brown rivers of sewage that backwash from broken pipes. The biggest fear in these parts isn't sniper fire or IEDs, but a flat tire that forces you to wade through the reeking fluids. Occasionally, that fear is realized—like on the day when I met Ali.

When pulling security for a crew that's changing a tire, you need to make sure that your head is constantly moving, if only to provide snipers with the illusion that you're paying attention. It's especially important to keep up the movement when talking to local nationals (LNs). There are very few we trust to give us accurate information about insurgents; they usually just complain about big issues that are out of our hands.

It was during one of these head-swiveling sessions that a short but unusually healthy-looking Iraqi kid approached out of my periphery wearing an Adidas hat and snowboarding t-shirt, his lower torso swallowed by one of Little Venice's excrement canals. It was no surprise that he spoke some English. Every Iraqi can speak English well enough to ask for things they want from American soldiers.

"Mistah Mistah, give me $50," he demanded, somewhat politely compared with other children. But I was still taken aback by the sum.

"Oh, hell no. ... Are you kidding?" I began laughing, and he joined in, aware that the amount he had requested was outrageous.

"Yes, I know," he said, placing his right hand over his heart the way Iraqis do when they greet you formally or apologize for something. "What is your name?"

"My name's Scott. What's yours?" My head was still on a swivel, and I was pacing in slow arcs back and forth between the pit crew changing the tire and a small alley jutting off to the left. Alleys are a prime spot for people to lean out of, shoot a rocket-propelled grenade from, and then disappear back into.

"Here, in Iraq, my name is Ali. But, in California, my name is James Bond."

"No way ... that's awesome!"

"Yes, are you from California?"

"No, I'm from St. Louis." He wrinkled his nose in confusion, the way most Iraqis do when I tell them that I'm from St. Louis.

"It's near Chicago."

"Ah, yes, Chicago. ... Go Cubs."

"How do you know so much about America? How do you speak English so well?"

"My family lives in Los Angeles. In California."

"No shit. ... Do you want to move there someday?"

"Yes, I will. Then I will do this..." and he pointed at me.

"What? Join the Army?"

"Yes."

"Don't. Go to college instead." Maybe his English wasn't as accomplished as I had assumed, because he seemed confused.

"Look, look ..." he said, taking a piece of chalk out of his pocket and wading over to a crumbling brick wall. He wrote "USA" backward, in an Arabic fashion, then turned to me with a huge smile and pointed at what he had done. "See, see."

"Yeah, wow, cool," I said, leaning into the alley on the left and glancing up at the satellite dishes on its rooftops.

"Thomas!" yelled the gunner on top of my vehicle, giving me the finger circling in the air signal, which means that it's time to mount up.

I started to get back in my vehicle. "Well, Mr. Bond—Mr. James Bond—I hope you enjoy California."

The next day's mission set list didn't include me. I had tower guard from 0400 until 0800 instead. I went to guard shift, then got some sleep. When I woke up, the next day's patrol had already returned, and, as usual, the gaggle of guys who walked in and out of my room gave me updates on what had happened, who had been shot at, who had fucked up, who had chickened out, who had pulled off some great stunt of ingenuity. One of the privates sauntered in with a somewhat bemused expression.

"Hey, we were in Little Venice today, talking to LNs and shit."

"Anything happen?"

"Sort of. That James Bond kid you were telling me about—did he run around in an Adidas hat?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Those fuckers cut off his tongue."

"What? Who?"

"Shia militia, the police, I don't know. Apparently he had been talking to too many Americans."

"No fucking way."

"Yeah. Fuck them, man. I hate when this shit happens to kids."

We didn't go back to Little Venice for a raid or patrol or mission of any type for quite some time—maybe a month or two. But when we did eventually go back, I didn't have to look very hard to find Ali. He was mixed in with the throng of children who waded up to our convoy screaming for us to throw them chocolate or soccer balls. Of course, he wasn't screaming, but he was smiling and his hands were outstretched to catch whatever a soldier with a generous streak might be kind enough to throw at him. I wanted to yell, "Hey, James Bond! I hope you get to California!"—but I didn't. I just watched him scramble for the soccer ball that went bobbing away toward an alley and out of my field of vision.

It was with a strange mix of regret and sadness that I went to the phone center post-mission and called my parents. I spared them the gory story of Ali and his violent silencing. I spared them my own ambivalence about feeling obligated to protect "those people" by putting my own life on the line. I also spared them the primitive guilt I felt at not being able to help a child. I realized that the more guilt I felt about being unable to help a specific person, the more ambivalent I became toward the population in general. It felt very un-American to have such a subtle balance of apathy and rage and remorse and fear operating simultaneously, but I was comforted to know that I wasn't alone. All of the Joes feel this way. We rarely mention it back on base—maybe because it's so obvious and maybe because there isn't any point. We are usually too busy getting ready for our next mission, anyway. **SCOTT THOMAS**

Scott Thomas is a pseudonym for a freelance writer and soldier currently serving in Baghdad.

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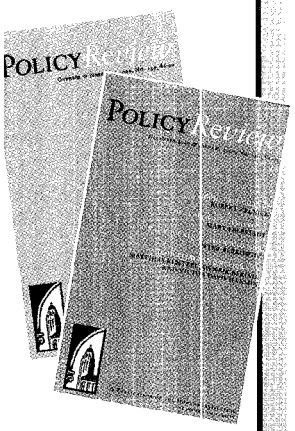

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—Ying Ma

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—Thomas H. Henriksen

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